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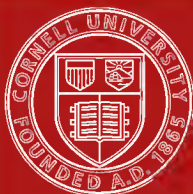
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IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

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# THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

BY

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## PREFACE

THE Old Testament, so full of inspiration to those who understand how it grew, is no less full of perplexity to those—and they are many—whose duty it is to expound it in the day school, the Sunday school, the Bible class, or the pulpit. For the first effect of criticism is undoubtedly to disturb and confuse. To those who are imperfectly acquainted with its methods and results a certain sense of insecurity and bewilderment is inevitable. Fortunately, large sections of the literature are simple and intelligible enough; but other sections are beset with difficulties and problems which paralyse the power of the teacher or the preacher to use them in a way that is fruitful and persuasive to the modern mind, unless he has the key. With the former sections this book does not deal: it deals almost exclusively with the areas that create the perplexity.

These are, speaking generally, (i) tales of the early world, of the patriarchs, and of Moses and the wilderness wanderings; (ii) tales that involve or seem to involve miracle; (iii) tales of judges and kings, told in different and sometimes conflicting sources, or told by later ages to idealize the great

## The Use of the Old Testament

figures of the past, or told to point a moral ; (iv) words of the prophets, which, frequently difficult of themselves, are often as good as unintelligible, unless we know something of the situation into which they were spoken. To these I have added a few psalms, an excerpt from Proverbs, and a brief study of Job.

The choice of the passages has been determined by the fact that they have all but one or two been included in the passages prescribed for study during the past few years in the *International Sunday School* series, and they would all have to be faced by any teacher in the day school or Sunday school who had to present to his class a continuous view of Old Testament history and religion. The presence in Israel's literature of what would be frankly called myth and legend if met with in any other literature, the emergence of miracle, of crude or imperfect morality, or of primitive conceptions of God, leave in the mind of the devout but uninitiated teacher a sense of helplessness, from which nothing can deliver him but a true conception of the purpose of the Biblical writers, as interpreted by reverent criticism ; and the best way to make this purpose plain seemed to be, not to speak about the Bible in general terms—that has often been helpfully done before—but to deal with specific passages round which those difficulties gather. This selective treatment naturally does not present a complete conspectus of Hebrew history, but within the his-

## Preface

torical and prophetic sections the passages are in chronological order.

Every passage has an idea at the heart of it—an idea primarily at the heart of the man who wrote it—and it is the interpreter's business to recapture that. Through the primitive and often perplexing material the ancient writer, who is essentially a preacher rather than a historian, is striving to convey to his readers, not only information, but warnings, inspirations, ideas of God, man, and the world, which fill his own soul. When we have learned to distinguish between the material presented and the idea to be conveyed through it—between, *e.g.*, the story of Jonah and the idea of the all-embracing love of God which that story is told to enforce and illustrate—we are well on the way to mental peace. Half in sorrow, half in anger, the question is often asked, "What have the critics left us?" and the answer is "Everything." Criticism would not if it could, and could not if it would, argue the material out of existence; its aim is to help us to understand that material, and, above all, the religious purpose which shapes and controls it. In this way that old literature comes back into our modern world with all the charm and aroma of its ancient setting, and finds a place in our minds as well as in our hearts.

Perhaps more provision might be made for the study of the prophets than is generally accorded to them in Sunday school programmes; but doubtless it is upon the history, with all its life and colour

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that, in the teaching of the young, the stress should chiefly fall.

The first chapter appeared in *The Congregationalist* of America ; all the others in *The Homiletic Review*. To the editors of these magazines I am deeply indebted for their courtesy in permitting me to reprint them.

JOHN E. M'FADYEN.

GLASGOW,

14<sup>th</sup> July 1922.

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# THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

## THE TEACHER'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

UNDOUBTEDLY the attitude, methods, and results of modern scholarship have profoundly affected the preacher's and the teacher's use of the Old Testament, and it would be idle to minimize the difference that has been made. Nothing is more natural than that, among those who use the Old Testament, whether for purposes of teaching or private edification, the first feeling should be one of consternation, as they seem to see the dear familiar stories slip from them one by one.

Now much of this consternation is quite unjustified and unnecessary. For the most part the discussion is in the hands of men to whom the Bible is very dear, and whose supreme object is to discover and live by the truth. If they happen to reach results which, in some directions, seem to be startling and unconventional, that is no more than has always happened when the Church was alive. There was indeed a time when criticism wore the appearance of being

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largely negative and destructive, but to-day the constructive spirit is dominant.

The part of the Old Testament in which the difference created by the changed methods and outlook has been most keenly felt is probably the historical part; and yet it must be remembered that quite a large area of the historical books has been little affected. In its main features, the book of Judges is as historical as it is graphic, and when we come to the times of David, we are on ground which is all but universally admitted to be strictly historical; indeed, one of the documents that contribute to the story of David's career has the appearance of being almost contemporary (2 Sam. 9-20). The part, then, whose historicity has been most seriously disputed, is the Pentateuch or Hexateuch—that is, the first five or six books of the Old Testament.

### THE REMOTENESS OF THE RECORD FROM THE EVENT

It will be worth while to look at some of the reasons which have led scholars to question the strictly historical nature of these books. One of the chief reasons is the distance of the events from the records of them. This is obviously and abundantly clear to anyone who carefully considers the Creation story. No one could possibly know what precisely took place at the creation of the world or of man, for the simple reason that no one was there to see. "Where wast

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thou," asks God of Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38<sup>4</sup>). Of course, it is conceivable that the knowledge of these things was supernaturally imparted, but the writer of the Creation story nowhere lays claim to such supernatural knowledge; and the whole drift and temper of the narrative show that he is interested in things moral and religious rather than in things historical and scientific.

But let us leave those remote beginnings and come down to times relatively historical—let us say, the days of Abraham. The now famous Hammurabi inscription has enabled us to fix the date of Abraham as about 2100 B.C., if we assume, as is commonly done, that Hammurabi is the Amraphel of Genesis 14. The date of Moses is approximately 1200 B.C. Now, even supposing Moses wrote the Pentateuch—and every critical scholar to-day puts it much later—he is nearly a thousand years removed from Abraham; and under such conditions, would it be fair to expect a strictly historical account? The demand would be fair only if we had reason to believe that original and authentic documents of the earlier times had been faithfully transmitted down the centuries; and we have no reason whatever to believe that, nor is any such claim anywhere made. To appreciate the situation, we have only to put ourselves a thousand years back. To write an authentic history of the America of a thousand years ago would be absolutely impossible; or—to confine the parallel

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within the Anglo-Saxon race—to write such a history of the times of Alfred the Great would be very difficult ; and we have access to books, chronicles, etc., of the time, such as we have no reason to believe the earliest Hebrew historians had of the remote times of which they tell. In other words, the only medium for perpetuating a knowledge of ancient times was oral tradition ; and the moment we admit that, we have admitted much. For tradition, while it may preserve the large outlines of historical events, enriches, embellishes, transforms ; and while of great value for many purposes, it can never be regarded as an adequate equivalent for history.

### THE DIVINE APPEARANCES IN HEBREW AND GREEK LITERATURE

But there are other reasons drawn from the nature of religion itself, for doubting the strict historicity of those early stories ; the chief of these is the frequent mention of divine appearances. Anyone familiar with early Greek literature must be struck by the similarity between the conception of deity there and in the early Hebrew stories. Just as in Homer the gods and goddesses can move up and down the earth, appear and speak to men, so in Genesis, Jehovah, like a man, walks in a garden in the cool of the day, he enjoys the hospitality of Abraham beneath a tree, he speaks with Moses face to face as a man with his friend. The religious teaching which these stories

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embody—for example, God's interest in and friendship for men—is attractive and suggestive ; but that is not to say that the stories themselves are historical. Indeed, we have the Bible's own warrant for questioning this. “ No man,” we are told, “ hath seen God at any time ” (John 1<sup>18</sup>). This is just what we should expect, if God be spirit ; yet the earlier narratives are full of divine appearances of a physical kind.

It is an interesting and profitable exercise to watch the Hebrew mind gradually transcending its earlier limited conceptions of God. Sometimes the higher and the lower views may be found within the same chapter. In Ex. 33<sup>11</sup>, we read that “ Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend ” ; a profounder view occurs a few verses further on, “ Thou canst not see my face ; for man shall not see me and live ” (*vv.* 20–23). A more severely spiritual view still occurs in Deut. 4<sup>12–15</sup>, where it is urged with great emphasis, as if in opposition to popular conceptions, “ Ye only heard a voice, ye saw no manner of form.”

These, then, are some of the reasons which justify doubts as to the strict historicity of the earlier stories. But, in that case, what is the teacher to do ? Does his teaching not depend for its force and validity upon the historical truth of the stories ?

To begin with, the teacher's first interest must be in truth. If he is convinced by the arguments we have offered that the tales cannot always be strictly historical, he may be sorry, he may feel helpless,

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but he must learn to adjust himself to the new situation. And that situation is nothing like so terrible as he may at first suppose. For one thing, it may be to him a positive relief to be no longer under the constraint of believing the literal interpretation of some of those ancient tales. They lie completely beyond the pale of his own experience, he never has been able to fit them into his scheme of the world, and he is relieved to learn that they but represent an ancient conception of religion.

But, further, it has to be remembered that a cautious criticism does not by any means altogether deny the historicity of the early narratives. It used to be the fashion to discount tradition as unhistorical ; now it is seen and acknowledged that tradition has even a certain historical value. The detail may be filled in by a vivid popular or poetic imagination, but the larger outlines, the salient features, are historical. For example, behind the story of the call of Abraham lies undoubtedly a great migration westward and a great religious personality.

### THE VALUE OF THE RELIGIOUS TRUTH UNAFFECTED

Most of all, however, is it important to remember that these stories are told to illustrate moral and religious truths, and this consideration should put heart again into the teacher whom the rumours of criticism have perplexed. All through the historical

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books to the end of Kings, we feel that the writers are interested in the religious rather than in the political facts. Of the latter, they could have given us immensely more had they pleased ; note how often the historian in Kings refers his readers for further information to the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel or Judah. But they touch these very lightly because they were interested in another order of fact altogether—the religious. Even if we were to take the book of Genesis as literal history, the historical facts are, after all, very few ; it is the religious significance of human life and history that the writers care about, and surely we are doing them no injustice if we fasten our interest upon the thing that interested them. They took the ancient traditions of their people, and into them wove their inspired and wonderful views of God and man. Morally considered, nothing could be more dramatic or powerful than the story of Joseph. He reached in the end his seat beside the king, but it was only after a discipline long and stern and sore ; he had first to learn what it was to be thrown by cruel, jealous hands into the empty well, and then what it was to languish in a foreign prison. And again, the nemesis which slowly but surely follows on the heels of crime has never been more brilliantly illustrated than in the story of Joseph's brethren. They thought that by a crime they had shaken themselves free of their brother ; yet the past was not dead, but only buried. Years afterwards it rises

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up and looks them in the face; when they hear from the lips of the governor of all Egypt the fateful words, "I am Joseph, whom ye sold."

This is all morally true. It is a profound reading of the facts of life, and has been verified a thousand times in history. Whatever the historical facts that underlie the patriarchal stories may be, the story of Abraham would still illustrate the trials and the rewards of faith; the story of Jacob would still illustrate the power of sin to haunt and determine a man's career, and the power of God to humble, discipline, and purify a self-confident nature; the story of Joseph would still illustrate how fidelity amid temptation, wrong, and sorrow is crowned at last with glory and honour. The spiritual value of these and similar tales is not lost, even when their historical value is reduced to a minimum; for the truths which they illustrate are truths of universal experience.



## TALES OF THE EARLY WORLD

### THE CREATION

(Gen. 1<sup>1</sup>-2<sup>3</sup>)

THE first chapter of Genesis is the great Hymn of Creation. The 104th Psalm has the same theme, and is more picturesque and poetic in its phrasing ; but in essential nobility, dignity, and majesty, the prose poem with which the Bible opens is not a whit behind it. As a frontispiece to the Bible it is singularly appropriate. For the Bible is the story of God and His loving purpose for the world, and that love and that purpose are as old as creation ; the Old Testament is the story of God's dealings with Israel, the people He chose to interpret that purpose. So the story of Israel is carried back to the very beginning of things, and in the beginning was God.

This is the key to the first chapter, explaining alike its method, its emphasis, its affirmations, its omissions. In its account of creation there is much that a student of science would look for in vain ; but on the very threshold he is reminded that the real quest which the Hebrew historian seeks to satisfy is the quest for God. Behind creation is a Person—a Person with a

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purpose ; the mighty process begins, continues, and ends in God. The reader penetrates some little way into the mystery and wonder of creation, when he faces and acknowledges the majestic Person behind it all.

The climax and crown of creation is man, and the first chapter may be described as the preparation for human history. It shows how, stage by stage, the world was fitted to be his home and the arena for the development of the purpose of God. There is much artistic skill as well as religious insight and power in the construction of the story, which reflects the comeliness and order visible everywhere throughout the universe. Between the work of the first three days and of the next three there is a fine correspondence. First, a place is made ready for the various types of creatures destined to appear, and not till the place is ready for their reception do these creatures emerge. Corresponding to the light of the first day are the sun, moon, and stars of the fourth ; corresponding to the firmament and the waters of the second day are the birds and the sea-monsters of the fifth ; and corresponding to the earth, with its grass and herbs and trees, of the third day, are the animals and man of the sixth. Those who described the creation of the world in this way must have been deeply impressed with the symmetry and order of the universe, with the wonderful adaptation of life to environment, and with the traces of development, progress, and purpose running through phenomena,

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which we are now only beginning at all adequately to appreciate.

Fierce conflicts have raged—and faint echoes of them can still be heard—over the so-called contradictions between the teaching of science and the teaching of Genesis. Religious men have been perplexed and scientific students have waxed merry and scornful over an account of creation which separated the story of light from that of sun, moon, and stars, which represented an earth covered with vegetation before the birth of the sun, which seemed to imply, in its chronological setting, that the world was not quite six thousand years old, and that it was created in six days. All the evidence from astronomy, geology, palæontology, archæology, is overwhelmingly opposed to such an account of the origins of things, and escape has been sought along many lines — by assuming, for example, that the creation days were not ordinary days, but represent vast periods of time. This, be it noted by the way, does not well agree with the repeated statement that “there was evening and there was morning.”

Every student of science knows that between these two accounts of creation no real reconciliation is possible ; but every student of the Bible should remember that no reconciliation is necessary ; for the Bible is a book of religion, not of science. It does not present us with scientific facts, but with the fact of God. It does not tell us, with any pre-

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cision of detail, how the world was created, it ushers us into the presence of God, in whose light we see light. The simple science underlying Gen. 1 is that of the ancient Hebrew world, upon which it is surely no blasphemy to suppose that the patient investigations of many centuries have made a real advance ; but the religion is the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever. Indeed, it is nothing less than astonishing to see how closely, in its broad outlines, Genesis anticipates even the findings of modern science. Both are inspired by the same sense of the world as an ordered system, moving from that which is simple to that which is more complex, reaching its highest manifestation in life and culminating in man. There is no real quarrel. The religious man must learn to welcome such facts as an honest and patient science may discover, and the scientific man must learn to find room for God.

The master thoughts of the passage are these : (1) That behind the universe is a Person. It is not the outcome of chance but the expression of a sovereign will. (2) That Person has a purpose. Deliberation and design mark every step of the creative process, and the whole moves forward toward the consummation of some divine purpose. (3) The process culminates in man, and the purpose is that he should be really, as he is ideally, the image of God.

# Tales of the Early World

## MAN THE CROWN OF CREATION

(Gen. 2)

The beautiful story in Genesis 2 is crowded with fruitful suggestions. Most Old Testament scholars regard it as parallel to, and more primitive than, the creation story in Genesis 1. The chapters have certainly much in common. Both are inspired by the same belief in the omnipotent creative power of God, and in man as His noblest work. But the differences are also striking—in style, in spirit, in theological implications, and even in presentation of fact. In chapter 2, man is made before animals, in chapter 1 the animals are made before man. The style of chapter 1 is more severe and orderly, and the conception of God, though not more noble, is more austere. There He has but to speak and it is done—the writer has nothing to say as to how it is done. Creation is a mystery before which one can only bow in reverent silence. In chapter 2 we are shown how Jehovah fashions the man, and the same word is used as of the potter when he fashions the clay. The solemn majesty of chapter 1 is replaced by the vivid and anthropomorphic picturesqueness of chapter 2. There is not space to amplify these contrasts, but most scholars feel them to be real. They cannot be ignored by those who are interested in the development of Hebrew thought; but to those who care only for the religious significance of the Bible, each account may be

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taken by itself, and allowed to suggest its own lessons.

The unique dignity of man is finely suggested by verse 7. On one side he is related to the "dust of the ground"—in Hebrew the words for "man" and "ground" are similar in sound—though even this lifeless form is cunningly fashioned by the fingers of God; but into this God breathes through the nostrils the breath of His own life. This phrase is avoided, no doubt intentionally, in the later verse (19), which describes the creation of the animals; and it is clearly implied that something of the divine life, communicated by God Himself, is resident in man. This is expressed, no doubt, in a quaint and primitive way; but it points to the same fact as is otherwise expressed in chapter 1 by the phrase "God created man in His own image" (verse 26)—the fact of the lonely pre-eminence of man among created things; and of his participation, in unique measure, in the divine life.

In this noblest of His creatures God takes a special interest, because He wishes to make him His friend, and the chapter proceeds to describe the discipline to which He subjects the man whom He has made. The first point is that his life is not to be spent in idleness; he has a work to do. Pleasant and congenial it may be—to keep the trees in the beautiful garden of Paradise—but none the less obligatory. At the very beginning the Bible strikes that high note of serious purpose, which characterizes it throughout.

## Tales of the Early World

The garden in which the man was to work out his destiny is described in the vivid colours of ancient imagination ; in it are two mysterious trees such as never grew in any earthly garden, one conferring upon those who partook of it the knowledge of good and evil, and the other immortal life. The magical property of these trees shows plainly enough that the story belongs to the realm of primitive religious fancy, but this must not blind us to the profound and powerful teaching of which it is the vehicle. The voice of God, which is another name for the voice of conscience, forbade the eating of the former tree, through which was to come the bitter knowledge of sin and its consequences ; if that solemn voice was to be disobeyed, then the happy days in the beautiful garden were forever at an end, and black grim death awaited them. This feature of the story suggests that God is interested in the moral education of man. The fair scenes in which he was placed, and in which he enjoyed so wide a range of liberty, were not without their temptation ; there were pleasures in them it was wrong to taste, things it was wrong to do, and disobedience to the warning voice meant ruin and death. The work God gives a man to do offers him an opportunity to develop conscience and character.

The narrative next finely suggests man's need of companionship, and especially of that companionship involved in the family ; and it quaintly represents the animals as being created by the Lord God, and brought before the man with a view to discovering

## The Use of the Old Testament

whether among them any help might be found suitable for him. But though many of them were his superiors in many important qualities, strength, swiftness, etc., none among them was fit to be his fellow ; here again is suggested the immeasurable superiority of man to the animals, though they too are the creatures of God. Only in one like himself—like but different—could man find the help he needed ; and woman, the creature alone fit to be his companion, is finely represented as coming into being by a special mysterious exercise of the divine creative power—a powerful tribute to the Hebrew conception of the worth and dignity of woman.

The story teaches, then, that God is profoundly interested in the education and welfare of man. He gives him work to do, laws to obey, a conscience to respect, and a helper for the fulfilment of his high destiny. Man is not only God's creature, but God's friend.

### THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF SIN

(Gen. 3)

This chapter was written by a master of the human heart. He had been deeply impressed by the sorrow of life, the endless toil of man, the pain of woman, the death which lies at the end for all, and here he seeks to explain how these things came to be. The story abounds in primitive conceptions ; in its garden with the wondrous trees, its God who walks



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up and down the garden in the cool of the day, its speaking serpent, its strange cherubic figures, and its mysterious flaming sword which kept the gates of Paradise, we feel that we are on a sort of enchanted ground ; but behind these conceptions, which belong rather to the realm of religious poetry and primitive imagination than to history, lie the profoundest moral and religious ideas. Man, according to the story, was once in Paradise ; nothing is more certain than that he is not there now. How came he to be cast out ? The answer is that the cause of his expulsion was his own sin ; and in its delineation of the nature, origin, and progress of sin in the human heart, in its psychological insight and religious power, this ancient narrative has never been surpassed.

It is easy to see how the serpent came in course of time to be regarded as the devil. In the story the serpent is strictly an animal—a beast which crawls upon its belly (verse 14) ; but in its spirit it is evil, hostile alike to God and man ; and with its glittering eye, its sinuous coils, its stealthy motion, its horrible fascination, it is a peculiarly apt symbol of temptation. It skilfully begins by appealing to the woman as more susceptible than the man, and insinuating doubts about the character of God. “ True, God had set her and her husband in a beautiful garden ; but He had restricted them in the use of its fruit, and this restriction savoured somewhat of tyranny and jealousy. To eat of the mysterious tree would raise them to the level of God Himself, and the

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jealous God could not allow that." The subtle argument stimulated the woman's curiosity. She looked wistfully at the tree till, fascinated by its beauty, its mystery, its promise and potency, she yielded and fell.

There is not a more profound and summary analysis anywhere of temptation in its various phases than that contained in verse 6. The tree was (1) good for food ; (2) a delight to the eyes ; (3) desirable to make one wise ; here is temptation coming in the form of a sensuous impulse, an æsthetic enjoyment, an intellectual ambition. Before this temptation the woman fell, and the man was immediately involved in her fall—another fine touch ; she holds the key of his destiny. No sooner is the sin committed than the loud voice of God and conscience is heard ; and at once the culprits attempt to escape. But from it there is no escape. In one or two searching questions the ugly fact of their deliberate disobedience is laid bare, and they stand self-convicted before the God whom they have offended. Here again the picture is drawn with marvellous fidelity to the facts of human nature. The man is at once cowardly and insolent. First he hides, then he throws the blame upon the woman and even upon God Himself ; for " it was you who gave her to me." Similarly the woman blames the serpent. How characteristic of a bad conscience is this uneasy searching for excuses ! But God is not mocked. He may be insulted, but He cannot be deceived ;

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and the wages He sets for disobedience are sorrow and death. So in solemn words, which have the rhythm of poetry, the Judge pronounces sentence : degradation for the serpent, pain and sorrow for the woman, bitter toil for the man, and death at the last for both, and, while they live, perpetual exclusion from the beautiful garden of Paradise, whose gates are to be henceforth guarded by mighty mysterious beings and a whirling sword of fire, which will effectually keep the sinners from the tree of life, that tree of which if they had contrived to eat, they would have lived for ever.

A spirit of the intensest moral earnestness pervades the story. It does not describe the first sin, but rather the essence and effects of sin. Sin is disobedience to conscience and to the laws of God ; this it is which has darkened the world and brought into it pain, misery, and death. The teaching of the story is well summed up by Professor A. R. Gordon, of Montreal, in his *Early Traditions of Genesis* (p. 162) :

“The subtle temptation, the thought of the pleasantness of the forbidden good, the chafing of the spirit against the limitations God has seen fit to impose, the secret pleasure found in doing the wrong, the drawing of another into partnership in the evil thing, the sudden quickening of consciousness, the feeling of shame and guilt, the troubles of conscience, the fear and uneasiness in God’s presence, the desire to be ‘hid’ away from His face, and the childish attempt to pass over the

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blame to another. All this is a transcript from real experience."

### CAIN AND ABEL

(Gen. 4<sup>1-15</sup>)

The story of human sin, begun in Adam and Eve, is continued in Cain their son, who exhibits it on a still more tragic scale. He was a tiller of the ground, his brother Abel was a shepherd, and each expressed his gratitude to God for His goodness by offering a portion of his produce—Cain of his fruit, Abel of his sheep. The latter offering met with the divine approval, the former did not, though we are not told either how that approval was indicated or why it was accorded to the one man and not to the other. It is common to say that the difference in the treatment of their offerings is explained by the difference in the spirit of the worshippers. But the narrative does not say so ; and, though Cain shows himself in the sequel to be an unworthy character, more probably the original idea was that Jehovah approved of the shepherd life, but not of the agricultural, and the narrative would then be written from the shepherd's point of view. To some this may seem unnatural and improbable ; but we have to remember that this same conflict of ideals appears in other parts of the Old Testament, and that the settled agricultural life, associated as it had been with Canaanite worship, was in some quarters—and especially by

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some very zealous worshippers of Jehovah—deliberately rejected (Jer. 35<sup>1-11</sup>, cf. 2 Kings 10<sup>15f.</sup>).

However that may be, Cain gave way to dejection and anger ; certainly the worship of such a man as he shows himself to be could hardly be well pleasing to the God who looks upon the heart. The words addressed to him by God in verse 7, though the text is more obscure than one could wish, finely suggest the peril of harbouring resentment in the heart ; in such a mood sin, like a wild beast, is already crouching at the door, ready to spring, for “unto thee is its desire”—it longs to crush thee—“but thou shouldst rule over it.” (These last two clauses, however, may have crept in from 3<sup>16</sup>.) Cain lures his brother into the open country, where they would be unobserved, and slays him. At once Jehovah appears upon the scene, summoned by the blood of the murdered man—for blood can speak, and God, who loves justice and hates murder, can hear it. Sin is uglier than it was in the preceding story ; Cain is at once more cruel, defiant, and false than Adam. He denies all knowledge of Abel ; besides, his brother’s welfare is no concern of his. Then the infallible Judge pronounces sentence : the ground, from which it was already so hard to win sustenance (3<sup>17-19</sup>) would henceforth yield him nothing, so that he would require to betake him to the wandering life of the desert. Overwhelmed with the prospect, Cain prays for the mitigation of his punishment. He shows indeed some lingering regard for God in

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his sorrow at being hidden from the divine face ; but, in the main, it is fear, and not penitence, that inspires his prayer—fear that in the lawless wilderness to which he is now condemned, and in which human life is held cheap, his life may be taken. To prevent this, Jehovah in mercy set a mark, probably some bodily sign, upon him—not to stigmatize him as a murderer, but to indicate that he was under Jehovah's protection. Members of the same clan, united in common worship, often bore some such distinctive mark, which would enable clansmen to recognize each other. It was further ordained that if the life of Cain was taken, seven lives of the murderer's family or clan would be taken in forfeit. This blood revenge is the summary justice of the desert, but it at least creates and teaches respect for human life.

The story bristles alike with suggestions and difficulties ; in it the most primitive and the most profound ideas jostle each other. It is apparently intended to explain the origin of sacrifice and of blood revenge, but it does not tell us where the men came from, whose lives were to be taken in place of Cain's. It implies a horror of the wild life of the desert, and its God seems to prefer the shepherd to the farmer. But He is the stern champion of justice ; He cannot let wrong go unpunished. If the warning is unheeded, the penalty must fall. Yet He is merciful withal ; even to the red-handed Cain He shows pity. The character of Cain is drawn in a few brief skilful strokes—his passionate, ill-regulated nature,

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his unbrotherliness, his jealousy, his violence, his insolence, his cowering under the misfortune he has brought upon himself. More particularly the danger and guilt of anger is emphasized, much as it is by our Lord in Matt. 5<sup>22</sup>, for it may issue even in murder. Sin is a beast which will crouch and spring and throttle, if it be not held in check.

The lessons of the passage have been well summed up by Professor Driver : “ The nature of temptation and the manner in which it should be resisted ; the consequences to which an unsubdued temper may lead a man ; the gradual steps by which in the end a deadly crime may be committed ; the need of sincerity in purpose lest our offering should be rejected ; God’s care for the guilty sinner after he has been punished ; the interdependence upon one another of members of the human race ; and the duties and obligations which we all owe to each other.” Still more strikingly Professor W. G. Jordan in his *Biblical Criticism and Modern Thought* (pp. 262 f.) :

“ The unworthy member of society is rejected by the soil, the very earth takes the side of justice ; it refuses to yield fruit to the man who has poured innocent blood upon it. Man is dependent on the soil ; his life is bound up with that of the family, the clan, and the tribe ; cut off from these he becomes a wanderer, a ‘ tramp,’ no one is responsible for him, anyone may slay him. The man who owes everything to society should respond to social claims and show respect for social duties. A man without a mark, a ‘ passport,’ to show to what tribe and God

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he belongs is a helpless creature. The mark of Cain was a gift of mercy, a protecting sign. The passport to-day means that the weight of a great nation lies behind the individual man. We talk much in these days about society as an organism, and the solidarity of the race ; and we do well to commune with men who lived in a small world less fully equipped with political forms and social machinery, with men in whose lives these ideas were primitive and palpitating, men whose very existence depended upon loyalty to the tribe and to the due observance of the fact that each man was his brother's keeper and helper."

### THE TEST OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

(Gen. 22<sup>1-19</sup>)

Abraham's life was a continuous test of his faith. That test began with the call to abandon all that he loved for the unknown land in the west : it came to him in its sorest form in the call—as it seemed to him—to sacrifice Isaac, his son. On this child depended all his own hopes for the future, on him hung the promises ; if this child were to perish, all Abraham's life would be a pathetic failure, and all his heroic sacrifices made in vain. To sacrifice his son was to sacrifice himself, his future, his all. Perhaps it was this very concentration of his affection on Isaac, upon whom so much depended, that woke in Abraham's heart the thought that God demanded this sacrifice of him ; for we cannot really suppose that the God and Father of Jesus Christ ever did



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make so inhuman a demand upon a father. Child-sacrifice was practised among the neighbouring peoples, as indeed later in Israel itself; and in the impulse to show to his God a similarly extreme and devoted homage, he seemed to recognize a divine call.

The story of their departure for the place of sacrifice is told with exquisite pathos—the father with his sore heart, and “thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest, even Isaac,” all unwitting of the cruel doom which awaits him. Every detail smites the reader’s heart with a fresh pang; for he knows, as Isaac does not, the deadly significance of it all—the wood, the fire, the knife. The spot to which they wend their steps is not very clear. Mount Moriah is apparently the hill on which the temple later stood at Jerusalem (*cf.* 2 Chron. 3<sup>1</sup>), but there are many good reasons for believing that the original text located the spot elsewhere. But, wherever it was, “they went both of them together”—a phrase charged with simple pathos, for, according to all expectations, only one of them was to return. The innocent questions of Isaac rend even our hearts, how much more Abraham’s! But through Abraham’s answer that God will provide Himself a lamb there gleams perhaps the faint and far-off hope that some providential release would be effected.

Very solemn is the description of the preparation for the sacrifice. The strain is almost more than

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we can bear, as we watch Isaac being bound and laid upon the altar. Then just at the point where the tension has become intolerable, at the moment when Abraham has raised the gleaming knife, and is about to plunge it into his beloved son, and to sever by the same blow all his own hopes for the future, a welcome voice from heaven breaks the horrible silence ; and, with a sigh of inexpressible relief, we hear the words ring out, " Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad." The child is saved, the future is saved, and Abraham, too, is saved. His faith has stood the frightful test, and has been crowned with a glorious reward. Now it is clear as the sunlight that he is a truly religious man, ready to offer to God the thing of all the world he loved the best. In the command, " lay not thine hand upon the lad," the true voice of Israel's religion and Israel's God is heard. The cruel gods of the Semites might seem to command the slaughter of a son ; but the genius of Israel's religion protests against so monstrous a demand.

For the son, just released from his awful doom, there appears, just at the proper moment, a providential substitute in the shape of a ram, caught in a thicket, which Abraham sees as he lifts up his eyes at the sound of the heavenly voice, and the ram was duly offered. On this spot Abraham had enjoyed a never-to-be-forgotten revelation of the goodness and the power of the God in whom all his life he had put his trust, and with singular propriety he called

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the place Jehovah-jireh, a name which is probably intended to suggest the double idea, "Jehovah sees" and "Jehovah is seen"; that is, Jehovah sees the needs of His servants and is seen—that is, shows or reveals Himself, in His power to deliver them in their extremity.

The story teaches, with extraordinary brilliance and power (1) that, at the call of God, a man must be prepared to sacrifice the thing he loves most dearly. Of course, when the rights of personality came to be understood, such a sacrifice as Abraham seems called upon to offer becomes absolutely impossible. But the broad teaching remains, that the most precious things must be willingly renounced at the call of God. (2) The real surrender which God demands is the surrender of the will. At bottom, what was demanded of Abraham was not the sacrifice of Isaac, but the sacrifice of himself—his own inclinations and will; and to this he showed himself equal in that "thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." (3) Man's extremity is God's opportunity. It was just when the crisis was most desperate that help came. The voice from heaven and the ram caught by its horns are symbolical of that Providence which mysteriously enters the experience of those whose child is lying bound upon the altar, and whose hope is all but lost.

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## JACOB AND ESAU

(Gen. 25<sup>27-34</sup>, 27<sup>1-45</sup>)

The stories told of Jacob and Esau in the last paragraph of chapter 25 and throughout chapter 27 illustrate the same point and raise for us the same problem. The point is the superiority of Jacob to Esau, or rather of Israel to Edom—for the respective qualities and destinies of the nations are typified in the ancestors from whom they spring; and the problem is how to reconcile the means by which this superiority was achieved with any worthy standard of morality. But it is worth noting that in spite of the mean advantage taken by Jacob of his brother's need in chapter 25, and though at first our sympathies, especially in chapter 27, instinctively run out to Esau, deeper reflection convinces us that Jacob is essentially the bigger man of the two, and that in him there are larger possibilities for good. Esau is the creature of the moment, governed by his immediate needs and impulses and incapable of taking long views: Jacob can take the future into account; he lives and works and schemes for that. Esau's actions are determined by his appetites, Jacob's by his ambitions. He knows the value of the birthright which involved "both a better position in the family and tribe, and also, ultimately, a larger inheritance than fell to any of the other brothers" (Driver); and, though at first he is a selfish schemer, already he shows qualities which,

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when touched to nobility by the experience of life's discipline and sorrows, will make of him a truly great character.

But at first that character is anything but lovely. It must not be forgotten, however, that he is the scheming son of a scheming mother. The deception to which he lends himself is one which his mother inspired. The conduct to which mother and son resort, in order to secure the coveted blessing, strikes our moral sense as more than usually mean. The father is old, blind, and supposed to be dying, and eager to give his blessing to the bold huntsman son whom he loves so well. He suspects that he is being imposed upon, but Jacob has made every possible preparation to throw him off his guard; and, finally, to disarm his suspicion, he coolly resorts to a deliberate lie: "Jehovah thy God sent me good speed"—a lie all the more disgraceful that it implicated the divine name.

Nothing, however, is more difficult than to read an ancient book in the spirit in which it was written; and it may be doubted whether those who told and listened to those early Hebrew stories would be offended by them as we are. One great scholar has suggested that they would probably be amused at the clever cunning of their great ancestor, and proud of its successful issue. Jacob, he points out, becomes more adept in his art as the years go on; he proves more than a match for Laban, and shows himself a perfect master of it by his treatment of his brother

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after his return (33<sup>12-17</sup>). The story they were listening to was that of their own ancestor, and, he argues, it must have been originally told to glorify him : in his triumphant cunning they find, with delight, their own character reflected. Morality has a history ; and though later Hebrews would have found Jacob's conduct as reprehensible as we do, that argues nothing for the earlier attitude. There is probably much truth in this ; for we have abundant proof that the men who gave us these stories in their present literary form were men of fine, sensitive, ethical temper, and they told those stories partly to illustrate the great truths of morality and religion. This aim shines out clearly in the last few verses of the chapter. Jacob has good reason to fear the vengeance of the man whom he has wronged, and on his mother's advice he takes to flight. He is to go to Haran for a few days. Perhaps she thought that Esau's resentment would then be spent, knowing him as she did to be swayed by the impulse of the moment ; but the days of absence lengthened into years, and we never read that she and Jacob met again.

The lesson is plain, that deception is heavily punished. It is impossible to hide long in a refuge of lies ; the rains will come and wash the refuge away, and the liar will have to start upon a long and weary flight. Deceit may be clever, but in the long run it is costly. It brought to Jacob separation from those whom he loved, exile in a foreign land,

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and many a trial and sorrow there. The days are linked each to each, and the falsehood which we sow to-day we shall reap in sorrow and disaster to-morrow, or if not to-morrow, after many days.

### JACOB AT BETHEL

(Gen. 28<sup>10-22</sup>)

Jacob now starts upon the long journey, to which he has been driven by his own sin. But at the very outset he is heartened by a strange experience which teaches him that he does not enter upon it unaccompanied. Resting at night upon some rocky ground, and with one of the stones for a pillow, he dreamed that he saw a ladder—suggested perhaps by the climbing rocks of the mountain-side—with its foot on earth and its top in heaven. On it angels were descending to the earth from their home in heaven—so apparently they were not winged. Overcome with glad awe Jacob exclaimed: “How dread is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven.” No doubt the ideas lying behind the original form of this story are of a primitive kind. Heaven was conceived as a place with a gate, just immediately above Bethel, and the angels who visit the earth reach it by means of a ladder. But behind the primitive form lies the permanent truth that heaven is not far from earth, and that heavenly ministers visit earth’s needy and lonely ones.

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This thought receives similar though less primitive expression in verses 13-16, which most Old Testament scholars believe to come from another and parallel document. Here it is not angels who appear, but Jehovah Himself, graciously renewing to Jacob the promise made to his father and grandfather, and adding the beautiful promise, special to Jacob himself, that He would Himself be with the lonely wanderer, and bring him back to his own land. Both stories—if two there be—agree in the fact that the sleeping Jacob was visited and cheered by celestial beings. To understand the thrill of interest with which this story would be read by later generations we have to remember that Bethel became one of the most famous sanctuaries in the kingdom—it was there, for example, that Amos (7<sup>13</sup>) delivered his heroic message—and the story which traced the sanctity of the place back to the patriarch Jacob would be heard or read with peculiar joy. The word Bethel itself means “house of God”; and the explanation in verse 17 connects it with the visit of the angels. This place, said Jacob, is the house of God, or, as in the Hebrew, the house of Elohim, which probably referred originally to the supernatural beings of his dream. But another explanation of the word lurks behind the statements in verses 18, 19, and especially 22, according to which the stone itself on which Jacob had been lying was the house of God. Jacob set it up, we are told, for a pillar, and poured oil over it. The pouring of oil



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was a religious act, and the pillar was therefore not a common memorial pillar. It is the regular word in the Old Testament for the sacred pillars which used to stand beside altars, though the time came when they were considered wrong and consequently proscribed (Deut. 16<sup>22</sup>). But in earlier times apparently the deity was supposed to reside in the stone. That is why it was anointed, and why it was called the house of God. So in this narrative we have really two explanations of the word Bethel, or house of God—one connecting it with the visit of the angels, the other with the sacred stone.

Then Jacob vows a vow ; and here, as in the earlier part of the story, we feel that we are moving among primitive ideas. The patriarch's requests are purely for things material—all he asks is food, clothes, prosperity, and a safe return ; and he makes his vow almost in the spirit of a man driving a bargain—if his requests are granted, he will worship Jehovah, and give Him a tenth. This is meant, no doubt, to illustrate the origin of the practice of offering tithes.

Primitive as is the expression of religious ideas in this passage, the ideas themselves are of profound and permanent value. There is (1) the thought that God is the great Companion. Jacob had left his home and all that he loved, but God met him and inspired him with the assurance that He would accompany him everywhere. To the young, who

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are just setting out upon life's way, leaving school for business, or leaving home, it may be, for the first time, this is a consolation and an inspiration of the very first order. When we go from the familiar scenes and people we love, God goes before us and with us. "I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest ; for I will not leave thee."

(2) There is the similar idea in the parallel story of the ladder with the angels, that heaven is not far from earth. Even in the bleak and barren stretches of our life, when we feel lonely and desolate, there may come to us experiences which so cheer and assure us that they seem like very angels from above, and which carry us up from the depths of our desolation to the very gates of heaven. (3) There is, lastly, the duty of practical gratitude. Most of us are better at offering petitions than at giving thanks. But when our life has been blessed, as was Jacob's, with some definite experience of comfort or joy, we should in turn express our thanks in some definite way. Our gratitude should not be allowed to remain a mere sentiment, it should find some practical expression. God has given us food and raiment, home and friends, health and strength, prosperity and protection ; is it not fitting that we should show our gratitude by giving to Him or to some of His needy ones some gift that shall cost us something ?

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## THE SIN THAT EXCLUDES FROM THE PROMISED LAND

(Numbers, 20<sup>1-13</sup>)

Of the actual wanderings of the people in the wilderness we know practically nothing. In Num. 13 f. the people are near the beginning of their wanderings ; in this chapter they are near the close, apparently in the fortieth year. Except for an account of a rebellion against Moses, which ended in the destruction of the rebels (chaps. 16-17), the intervening chapters deal with ritual and ecclesiastical matters.

An interesting and significant feature of the passage before us is that in another form the same or a similar story has appeared before. In Ex. 17<sup>1-7</sup> there is an account of the striking of a rock by Moses to procure water for the thirsty people, only that takes place at the beginning of the wanderings, this at the end ; and it is open to us to suppose, as on other similar occasions, that the real explanation is that these are but different versions of the same incident. Whether it happened at the beginning or the end is a historical question, like the cleansing of the temple in the gospels ; the religious interest of the passage is independent of any particular historical solution.

Here, as so frequently in the narrative, the people show up in a bad light ; despite their signal experiences of redemption. they perpetually come before

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us as murmurers and rebels. This thirst in the waterless wilderness is so overpowering that they wish they were dead ; better that they had died with Korah and his rebellious company (chap. 16) than be spared to endure this torture. They clamour as before (14<sup>2</sup>) against Moses and Aaron for bringing them out of Egypt (*cf.* 11<sup>5</sup>) to this cheerless desolation of a place. The leaders, with characteristic piety, withdraw to the sacred tent, where, as before (14<sup>10</sup>), when other leaders were in danger, the glory of Jehovah appeared, “ominous of the divine anger.” Then Moses is instructed to take the rod (whether his own, or, as some think, Aaron’s, *cf.* 20<sup>9</sup> with 17<sup>10</sup>), gather the people together, and, with Aaron, speak to the rock, which would then burst forth in an abundant supply of water. Moses does so, and then, addressing the assembled people in hot and passionate words, which clearly show that he has lost his temper, he struck the rock twice with the rod, and forth gushed the water. Then, to our astonishment, we read that because of what Moses and Aaron have done they were condemned not to bring the people into the promised land, and, by implication, not to set foot on it themselves.

Wherein precisely did the sin consist which was so terribly punished ? It is not easy to say. In unbelief—according to verse 12 : “Because ye did not believe Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel” ; but there is no indication of unbelief in verses 8–11, as they now stand. Another

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passage describes their sin as rebellion (27<sup>14</sup>), and yet others explain the exclusion of Moses from the promised land as due to Jehovah's anger on account of the disobedience of *the people* (Deut. 1<sup>37</sup>; 3<sup>26</sup>; 4<sup>21</sup>). There is no agreement as to the sin. Was it in smiting, when he should have spoken? But what was the rod for, which he was told to take, if not to smite? Was it in smiting twice, instead of once? or in smiting angrily? This is not explicitly said, nor is it a necessary inference. Was it, as Gressman suggests, in smiting incredulously: "he obeys the command, but still half incredulous strikes twice." This has the merit of agreeing with verse 12, "ye did not believe, *i.e.* trust Me"; and it is quite possible that this is the oldest form of the story, for verse 10 can be equally well translated, "*Can* we (instead of *must* we or *shall* we) fetch you water out of this rock?" If, in this supreme crisis, the leader failed in that faith in God which he had so frequently demanded from the people, then his exclusion would be very intelligible. It is true, as Professor G. B. Gray says in his commentary on Numbers (p. 261) that, as verses 8-11 "now stand, neither unbelief nor rebellion on the part of Moses and Aaron is recorded; either the one or the other has often been read into the verses, but neither is there. . . . It is difficult to discover Moses' sin, it is more difficult still to discover Aaron's, for he did not strike the rock either once or twice, and, indeed, all that the story says of him is that he assisted Moses to assemble

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the people at the rock." That is undoubtedly the impression made by the verses as they now stand, but in earlier forms of the story the unbelief may have been more apparent. The passionate temper which inspires Moses' speech to the people is a very human trait ; more than once we see him borne away by similar gusts of passion. Here is a real man, whose eyes can blaze with indignation and whose words are thunderbolts.

The fact that so many explanations are offered of Moses' exclusion from the promised land shows that there was something to explain. We can be surer of the fact than of any of the explanations. In reading the Bible, as we have frequently seen, it is always necessary to distinguish between historical fact and religious interpretation. Now the pathetic fact was that Moses, the great leader who had done and suffered so much for his people, and who finally led them to the verge of the promised land, was not spared to set foot upon it. How could that be ? That was the question which the religious spirit of Israel set itself to answer. Some answered it in this way, some in that, but it is highly significant of the profound religious temper of Israel that all connect it with sin, whether his own (rebellion or unbelief) or the people's (as in Deuteronomy). And the real moral of the passage is that sin shuts out of the promised land. That law which applies, as we see in 14<sup>23</sup>, to the common people, applies no less to the leaders of men. No one is exempt from

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it. There are blessed experiences, near indeed, but inaccessible, to the man who rebels against the ways of God, or who shows an evil heart of unbelief. Thus do men fatally shut themselves out from every land of promise (*cf.* Heb. 3<sup>19</sup>).

### BALAK AND BALAAM

(Num. 22<sup>1</sup>–23<sup>10</sup>)

Israel has been moving northwards, slowly but triumphantly. The 21st chapter of Numbers records a great and decisive victory over Sihon and the Amorites, who had challenged them to battle; and at this point, with great dramatic propriety, the prophecies of Balaam appear. Israel's power has been felt, something of her strange history is known, and Moab is afraid of her. The king summons Balaam, the famous seer, to curse her with a potent curse. But who can curse whom God hath blessed? Then—just before she sets foot on the promised land—from the lips of a stranger falls the prediction of her glorious and invincible destiny.

Such is the story of chaps. 22–24, briefly told; but the moment we look at the detail, we are again beset by perplexities like those we have met before. Of these perhaps the most perplexing is the transition from 22<sup>20</sup> to 22<sup>22</sup>. In verse 20 we read that God said to Balaam, "Rise up, go with the men," while in verse 22 we read that "God's anger was kindled because he went," because, that is, he did the very

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thing he was told to do. From our experience of other narratives, we are strongly tempted here to suspect the presence of two versions of the same story ; and this inference is confirmed by not a few other features. The two halves of verse 3 are manifest duplicates ; they twice state the fact of Moab's distress at the nearness and numbers of Israel. In verse 21 Balaam is accompanied on his journey by the princes of Moab, in verse 22 by his two servants. It is further significant that in the narrative parts of the section, verses 2-21, the word *God* is used, while throughout the section 22-35 it is *Jehovah* ; it is the angel of *Jehovah* (the LORD in the English Bible) who bars Balaam's progress. This is the key to the whole problem. There are here, as elsewhere in the Pentateuch, two documentary sources, one using predominantly the word *Jehovah*, and the other *Elohim*, or *God*—sources which, though they may differ in detail, yet agree so completely in the broad facts, that it is foolish, except for literary and critical purposes, to emphasize the differences. By frankly recognizing this double source we lose nothing that is essential, and we have a satisfactory explanation of otherwise bewildering facts. In the one document Balaam was told by God to go to Moab (verse 20) ; in the other he had apparently received no instructions, and is ready to go back as soon as the will of God has been made plain (verse 34). The sin which he there confesses was not disobedience to the revealed



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will of God, but defiance of the mysterious warning to advance no farther.

It happens to be of more than usual importance in this case to recognize the composite nature of the narrative, as a true appreciation of the real character of Balaam depends upon it. As the story lies before us, it is not unnatural, as it has not been unusual, to accuse Balaam of avarice; but when the two versions are read apart, we see that there is no real ground for such a charge. True, the messengers of Balak took him a present, but no disgrace was attached to the acceptance of this—Samuel is similarly rewarded for his services (1 Sam. 9<sup>7</sup>); and, though the second deputation was more distinguished than the first, and they held out the promise of a more brilliant reward, it must in all fairness be noted that this produces no effect whatever upon the mind of Balaam, who meets the temptation in noble and memorable words (22<sup>18</sup>, cf. 24<sup>13</sup>). No pecuniary consideration will deflect him from uttering the word he is inspired to utter. In an interesting passage of the *Autobiography* (chap. 4), Mark Rutherford tells us that the story of Balaam greatly impressed him, “and I date from it a distinct disinclination to tamper with myself, or to deliver what I had to deliver in phrases which, though they might be conciliatory, were misleading”—a warning which might be fittingly applied to our study of, and statements about, the Bible, towards which our attitude should be one of blended reverence and candour.

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No, the conflict in Balaam's mind is not between duty and avarice or ambition, but, as Principal G. A. Smith has said (*Expositor*, January 1913, p. 4), "between the habits and ideas under which the prophets of the heathen worked and the religious influence of a higher order which is represented as coming upon Balaam from the God of Israel." Balaam is essentially a heathen seer, he is subject to ecstasy (24<sup>31</sup>), he believes in rites and omens, he changes his site again and again at Balak's desire, as if the change of site might induce some change of message. In all this we see the true heathen; but struggling with these pagan elements, and ultimately reaching expression, was a nobler thing, a certain courage to face the facts and to let them make their natural and legitimate impression upon his mind. From his lofty height he looks down upon the plain where the hosts of Israel are spread (23<sup>9</sup>). He is awed by the splendid sight, and his tongue speaks frankly out the thoughts that have risen in his heart. No love of gain, no deference to his royal employer, will induce him to declare other than the truth. This, then, is the real lesson of the character of Balaam, to be loyal to the facts which we see, facts of truth, honour, and duty, and sternly to resist every temptation to ignore or be false to them.

The narrative moves in a circle of ancient ideas, implying as it does the power of speech in animals (*cf.* the speaking serpent in Gen. 3), and the power

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of a seer to utter an effective and irrevocable curse. But these things in no way affect the broad teaching of the story. Deep, however, as is its interest in Balaam, its deepest interest is in Israel herself, whose fortunes Balaam is made to declare in four fine poems with an ascending climax. The first dwells on the uniqueness and the numbers of Israel (23<sup>7-10</sup>), the second on her power and her conquests (23<sup>18-24</sup>), the third on her prowess and on the beauty and fertility of her land (24<sup>3-9</sup>), the fourth on the destruction of Moab (24<sup>15-17</sup>). The very power which had longed and planned for her destruction is itself to be destroyed. These four poems, instinct with a sense of Israel's actual and potential greatness, are an extraordinarily impressive exposition of the truth of the certain triumph of Jehovah's purpose through the nation which He chose to accomplish it. Thus, ere they crossed to the promised land, Israel's high hopes of splendid destiny were justified and re-kindled by Jehovah's words upon the lips of a foreign seer. If God be for us, who can be against us ?

## TALES INVOLVING MIRACLE

### THE CALL OF MOSES

(Exod. 3)

IN the Old Testament, a man who renders a great service to his people is frequently represented as beginning his career with a vision of God and a call from Him. All effective work must have "in the beginning God." So it was with Moses, and here we have the story of his vision and his call.

It is interesting to note that this great experience of God came to him in the exercise of his very ordinary and humble calling; it came while he was "keeping the flock." With his sheep he had wandered to the sacred mountain, here called Horeb, elsewhere sometimes Sinai—sacred already, perhaps, to the inhabitants of the district, and doubly sacred to later Israel as the scene of the revelation to Moses of the legislation, and of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel (*cf.* 1 Kings 19<sup>8</sup>). There Moses saw a wonderful sight—a bush burning yet unconsumed. The first half of verse 2 tells us that an angel appeared in the flame—this is the language of religion; but the second half describes the phenomenon in natural terms, and the third verse shows

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very plainly that at first Moses only regards it as "a great sight," and is moved by curiosity to go nearer in order to see precisely what it was. The words of Moses himself, who clearly at first saw no angel, justify us in attempting to discover the natural basis for this phenomenon. A great scholar, the late Professor W. Robertson Smith, said that it "must have its physical basis in electrical phenomena," associated with "the clear dry air of the desert or of lofty mountains." A recent traveller tells us that certain small bushes of the desert emit combustible gases which, when they have been given off in sufficient quantities, are ignited by the great heat of the eastern sun. The flame plays round the branches of the bush, which, so far from being injured, appears to enjoy its baptism of fire. To some such a suggestion will seem a degradation and almost an impiety; but it must be remembered that (1), as we have already said, it impresses Moses at first simply as a great and curious sight; and (2) that on either view of it, God or His angel (the two are interchangeable: *cf.* verse 2 with verse 4) was there, as He is behind all the wonders of this wonderful universe. Through all these things, if we have but the open ear, God is calling us by name, as from the bush He called "Moses, Moses." This is not to belittle the story, it is to bring it within the range of our own experience: it fills it full of meaning and inspiration for the least gifted and the most commonplace of us; for all the world, just

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because it is God's world, is full of visions and voices of God. In the fine words of Whittier :

“ We lack but open eye and ear,  
To find the Orient's marvels here ;  
The still small voice in autumn's hush,  
Yon maple wood, the burning bush.”

We may suppose that Moses has gone out with his flock in a disconsolate mood. His heart is sore as he thinks of his countrymen, crushed beneath the iron heel of Egypt ; and he may still have cherished at the bottom of his heart something of that passion to deliver his people which had led him to strike down the Egyptian who had smitten the Hebrew. But who am I, he thinks, to do this thing single-handed ? When suddenly he is arrested by the “ great sight,” which brings him face to face with God. The ground on which he stands, lonely and unpromising though it looks, is holy ground ; there, in that wonderful sight, God is facing him, calling him—the God whose presence will make all the difference. And He is the God of history as well as of nature, the God not only of the present but of the past, the God not only of the burning bush, but of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God whose glory not only flashes there before the dazzled eyes of Moses, but whose love has been continually shed abroad over the wide spaces of history, the God who watched over the fathers, who carried forward His great purpose through them, and who, despite the

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Egyptian oppression, must carry it further forward still. The omniscience and the love of God are suggested in very earnest and emphatic words (7-9). The long and cruel oppression looked as if He had forgotten His people. But no! "I have seen their affliction, and heard their cry, and I know their sorrows." He knows and He cares and He is resolved to deliver them, and bring them into the goodly land upon which His great purpose, interrupted for a while, is again to march steadily forward.

All this comes to Moses as a revelation, as he gazes at the burning bush and contemplates the past of his people, both together suggesting the power, the wonder, and the love of God. The revelation is an inspiration to the lonely shepherd, brooding over the sorrows of his people, and vaguely longing to help them. But he lacks one thing yet. He has confronted the God of the past in the story of the patriarchs and the history of his people; he confronts the God of the present in the bush that so mysteriously flames before him. But what he needs is a God of the future, and this is the next assurance that comes to him—"I am come down to deliver them." What God has shown Himself to be yesterday and to-day, the same will He be forever. But note how He fulfils His purpose! As He had revealed Himself through natural means, so He fulfils His purpose through human agency. "*I am come down to deliver. . . . Come now, therefore, and I will send thee.*" It is God who works, but

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He works in and through Moses, just as He may work in and through us. The deliverance of society will never be effected by men who simply sit and wait, or hope and pray, but by men who hear and obey the voice which says, "Come now and I will send *thee*."

But at first the heart of Moses sank before so stupendous a task. "I will send thee unto Pharaoh." How was the insignificant runaway shepherd to face the proud and mighty lord of all Egypt and urge upon him his amazing demand for the release of his people? Well might Moses say, "Who am I that I should go?" These are not the words of a coward, but of a man who has measured the sternness of the opposition, and the slenderness of his own resources. It is often the greatest who shrink. But if the work be God's, the workman may surely count upon His help. The humility and reluctance which plead with such pathetic sincerity, "Who am I that I should go?" are met and answered by the inexhaustible resources of omnipotent God who will equip and strengthen the man whom He has called. "Certainly I will be with thee." That is the answer which will everlastingly sustain the timid heart, and send it out with confidence to its tasks and battles. Well might a mortal tremble and refuse, when summoned to appear before the terrible presence of Pharaoh; but not surely if he remembered that behind and beside him was God.

With this experience of Moses some of the



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Hebrew historians associate a new name of God. From Moses on, the God of Israel is known as Jehovah. What the word originally meant it is impossible now to say ; but its very vagueness made it possible for its content to grow richer and deeper with the advancing religious experience of the people. What their God had ever been, that He would always be, and more.

The passage is crowded with suggestions, of which these may be singled out as the most salient : (1) Behind the "great sights" of nature is God. We should learn to see Him there and hear His voice in them. (2) God is the God of the future as well as of the past and present. The power and the love with which the present or the past has made us familiar, we can depend upon for ever. (3) God works through men. "I will deliver. . . . I will send thee." (4) God will sustain the man whom He sends. "Certainly I will be with thee."

### THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

(Ps. 105<sup>23-36</sup>)

The request of Moses, in the name of his people, for an opportunity to worship their God at a festival in the wilderness, had been haughtily refused by Pharaoh, and the time has now come when that proud and stubborn will must be bent by the God whose rights he had despised. At this point the plagues intervene ; and, as with the somewhat

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similar blows that were rained upon Israel herself four or five hundred years afterward (Amos 4<sup>6-12</sup>), they were sent partly in chastisement, and partly to bring the rebellious king to his senses, to penitence, and to God. Pharaoh must be convinced, in ways which he will feel, of the might of the God he has defied and of the folly of defying Him.

It is altogether fitting that Israel's story at the point which we have reached should be illustrated from the book of Psalms instead of the book of Exodus. In the book of Exodus the story of the plagues occupies over five chapters (7<sup>14</sup>—12<sup>30</sup>); in Ps. 105 it is disposed of in nine verses (28—36), and in Ps. 78 in eight verses (44—51). This is one excellent reason for basing the lesson on Psalms rather than on Exodus; the Psalms concentrate attention upon the results, they summarize the progress of events described—dramatically indeed, but with much repetition—in Exodus. The recital of the blows which fall in verse after verse—testimony alike to Jehovah's power and to Pharaoh's pride, obstinacy, and stupidity—is very impressive. Nor would it be wise to burden the memory with details as to the order of the plagues in Exodus, for the two Psalms which summarize the plagues give them in different order from Exodus and from each other. Even the tradition of the number of the plagues is not constant; six, or more probably seven, are given in Ps. 78, eight in Ps. 105, and, though ten is the number in the book of Exodus as we now have it,

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most scholars believe, that in the literary sources which lie behind the book the plagues vary in number and are variously distributed, one of the sources giving seven, and other two five each, no source therefore giving all ten. Probably, too, the flies of one version represent the lice of another, both being practically vermin, and the murrain of one appears to be equivalent to the boils and blains of another, and both may stand for pestilence. The very detail of the Exodus narrative, until it is thoroughly mastered, may leave an impression of somewhat blurred monotony upon the mind. The outlines in the Psalms are sharp and sure.

But there is a better reason still for considering the story of the plagues in the setting given to it by the Psalms. To the Hebrew, historical facts are never mere facts, they have always a religious meaning, they illustrate the mind of God. History is not merely a series of happenings, it is controlled by a purpose, and, according to the nature of the facts, is an inspiration or a warning. That is why so many of the Psalms are directly concerned with history—78, 81, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136—because history is crowded with manifestations of the loving or the chastising hand of God, of things to thank Him for, and things to be warned by. The two Psalms mentioned, which deal with the plagues at considerable length, treat Israel's history from these two points of view. That history is irradiated from end to end with the most striking exhibitions of the love

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of God. But Ps. 78, which is more sombre in temper, emphasizes rather the rebellious ingratitude with which Israel had responded to that love, while Ps. 105 holds the attention more upon the power and the love of Jehovah for His people, who are called upon at the beginning to remember all His marvellous works and to give thanks and sing praise for them. It is from this point of view that the plagues are considered; they are numbered among the marvels which are expected to call forth the devout gratitude of Israel.

This leads to the question: In what sense, if any, are the plagues miraculous (Ps. 105<sup>5</sup>)? It must be remembered that they are nearly all connected with experiences already familiar, at least in a less intense form, to Egypt, *e.g.* the discoloration of the Nile, the plague of locusts, etc., and they have consequently been described as "just miraculously intensified forms of the diseases or other natural occurrences to which Egypt is more or less liable," and the miracle would lie not so much in the experiences themselves as in their coming with the severity they did, and happening at the time they did. It is plainly stated, for example, that it was an east wind that brought the locusts, and a west wind that drove them away (Ex. 10<sup>13, 19</sup>). That is, they are due to a so-called natural cause. But to the Hebrew, and indeed to every truly religious man, there is no such thing as a purely natural cause, if by that is meant a cause independent of the great Cause, the God who is the

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source and sustainer of the universe ; and in 10<sup>13</sup> both attitudes are represented—the natural, so to speak, which says that “the east wind brought the locusts,” and the supernatural, which says that “Jehovah brought an east wind.” We do not propose to discuss the miracles in detail. They furnish us doubtless with problems of no small difficulty ; but this verse suggests to us a general attitude toward all such occurrences which no scientific facts or discoveries can overthrow—that behind all that happens, whether miraculous in the ordinary sense or not, is God, His wonderful power and His wonderful will. A “living God”—and that is the God of the Bible—a God who is “alive,” must be able to work miracles in the ordinary sense of that term ; whether He has actually done so in any particular case or not is purely a question of evidence. But we do well to take to heart the penetrating words of William Law in his *Serious Call* (chap. 22) : “When you consider God as acting in all things, and all events, then all things will become venerable to you, like miracles, and fill you with the same awful sentiments of the divine presence.” The point, then, is that through the plagues, whatever they were, and however they came, the power and presence of God were felt, and the purpose of God was being fulfilled.

But of equal interest is the more personal aspect of the story. The struggle between Israel and Egypt is concentrated in the struggle between

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Moses and Pharaoh, and surely there are few more splendid encounters than the meeting of these mighty men. To borrow words which I have used in my *Messages of the Prophetic and Priestly Historians* (p. 54) :

“ The magnificence of this struggle and the titanic courage of Moses are not clearly seen till we look well at the combatants and their resources : Moses strong in God and in the naked justice of his cause, Pharaoh the incarnation of a might at which even to-day men marvel. Think of Egypt’s colossal statuary, palaces, temples, tombs : it is the monarch of such a land that Moses defies. The foemen are well matched. Moses never yields an inch of ground, and Pharaoh yields but little. But it is a struggle of right against might, of the unseen with the seen, and the unseen must prevail. The plagues grow more awful ; the terrors heighten ; they wring from the haughty Pharaoh both entreaty and confession, and even win from some of his court an acknowledgment of Jehovah’s power. But at last in a climax of extraordinary magnificence Pharaoh rises like a giant, refuses the demand of Moses, and forbids him, on pain of death, to look upon his face any more. Moses takes him at his word and leaves him, with a flush of anger on his face, after announcing the most terrible blow of all ” (Ex. 10<sup>28</sup> ; 11<sup>8</sup>).

Pharaoh, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, is in a sense the hero of the story. The plagues are there because of him. In opposing Moses he is the opponent of God. The plagues are sent to convince him, and the moral is that he who refuses to be convinced will

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one day be overwhelmed. Sometimes it is said that Pharaoh hardened his heart, more often that God hardened him. This statement, which has perplexed many good people, means essentially nothing more than this, that it is a divine inexorable law that those who steel themselves against stern warning and sharp discipline will grow more sullen and desperate in their obstinacy, that the penalty of hardening the heart is to grow harder still, with a hardening whose end is destruction.

### CROSSING THE RED SEA

(Exod. 13<sup>17</sup>-14<sup>31</sup>)

The event here described is one of the most important, as it is one of the most dramatic, in Hebrew history. In some ways it is the most important of all. The later writers never grow weary of pointing their people back to the exodus, for it was then that Israel had had her first great historical experience of redemption; indeed, it was, at least in part, her escape from Egypt that made her later national career possible; and that redemption is concentrated, as it were, in the crossing of the Red Sea.

We have already seen how the Egyptians, under the strain of their awful experiences, had at last practically driven the Israelites out of their land, and we can well understand the graphic words of Ps. 105<sup>38</sup>: "Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them had fallen upon them."

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They had gone, but where were they to go to? Perhaps their objective was Palestine; perhaps, as Gressmann supposes, it was Kadesh, where they ultimately settled for a time. But at any rate, they are now on the edge of the wilderness, and it is interesting to watch the faith in Providence which inspires the story from the very beginning. It was felt that the choice of their route was in reality determined for them by God; it was He who, for good reasons, led them by one way rather than by another—by a way which would keep the people from discouragement and defeat (13<sup>17</sup>), and by which even the Egyptians would be compelled to acknowledge the superiority and glory of Israel's God (14<sup>4</sup>). It is interesting, too, to note the fine sense of the continuity of Israel's national career. The past lay far behind, but it was not forgotten; and "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him," in the sure faith that the Hebrew people would once again be settled in the ancient land of Canaan (*cf.* Josh. 24<sup>32</sup>), and past, present, and future would be seen to be but the unbroken development of a great divine purpose, realizing itself through that people and upon that land.

In spite of all that the Egyptians had suffered, when Israel had definitely gone, there came a revulsion of feeling. The Israelites, after all, had made fine slaves, and now Egypt was about to lose all this unpaid service, and off the king started in pursuit with his warriors and his war-chariots, finally over-



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taking them near the sea. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the locality of these events precisely. The so-called Red Sea (sea of rushes or reeds) represents in any case probably only the extreme north of the water we now call the Red Sea—whether the Gulf of Akaba to the right, or, as most scholars suppose, the Gulf of Suez to the left, or perhaps even a lake north of this, Lake Timsach, to which there is some ground for supposing that in ancient times the Gulf of Suez extended. This is a difficult geographical point, the decision of which in no way affects our religious appreciation of the story.

The horror of the Israelites as they found themselves pursued by the implacable Egyptians is graphically portrayed (14<sup>10</sup>). They cried in their agony to their God, and they uttered words of cruel reproach against Moses whom they blamed for their present perplexity. Here, as so often in the story, the lonely figure of Moses rises up in splendid contrast to the people about him. "Stand firm," he calmly assures them, "and you will see that your God will save you." But in truth, the situation is desperate enough, and one does not wonder that men quailed before it who had not the sublime faith and the lion heart of Moses. Behind them were the Egyptians, before them was the sea, and only a miracle could save them. But Moses saw more than the foe and the sea: "he endured," as Heb. 11<sup>27</sup> finely says, "as seeing the Invisible," he saw One whom the

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winds and the sea must obey. This is a presence which always puts heart into those who have the eyes to see it—"the angel of God," as it is called in the first half of 14<sup>19</sup>, and "the pillar of the cloud," in the second half. This latter idea of the guiding cloud and fire (*cf.* 13<sup>21</sup>) may have been originally suggested by the custom of "a brazier filled with burning wood being borne along at the head of a caravan of pilgrims, or an army," but it is finely symbolic of the presence of the God who "goeth on before" those whom He is leading into the wilderness.

Night aggravates the horrors of Israel's perplexity (14<sup>20</sup>); but the divine presence is represented as interposing between the two armies a thick darkness which protected the pursued from their pursuers. Then Moses raises the rod which, in one of the sources, accompanies the working of wonders, a violent east wind rises, which drives the water back; and over the bottom of the sea, thus bared, the people triumphantly pass. They are saved! But no sooner do they emerge from one perplexity than they plunge into another. To their consternation they find that the Egyptians are after them; again nothing but a miracle can save them; and again the miracle happens. Through the black cloud in the morning watch (between 2 and 6 A.M.), Jehovah looks—a wonderfully vivid way of suggesting flashes of lightning. The storm discomfits the pursuing Egyptians, their chariot wheels stick in the wet sand,

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and then, whether by the mere ceasing of the east wind, or by the rising of a west wind, the waters return, the Egyptians are drowned, and beyond all expectation Israel has been a second time delivered. Very graphic, almost suggesting an eye-witness, is the touch in 14<sup>30</sup>, "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore," and the result of it all was, as it well might be, to confirm the people's faith in their God, and in His servant Moses—a wonderful collocation which sets Moses in a position of the highest honour.

There are many suggestive things here, *e.g.* the calm confidence of Moses, when everybody else is perplexed and distracted, because, like Isaiah (6<sup>5</sup>; 7<sup>2-4</sup>), his eyes had seen the Lord. Again, there is the fine sense of the Providence that accompanies and guides those whom it calls to paths of perplexity or danger (13<sup>18-21</sup>). But naturally the chief interest centres round the crossing of the sea. Here, again, as everywhere in the Old Testament, many problems arise. Some have doubted or denied this fact; but without laying too much stress upon 14<sup>30</sup>, which almost seems to suggest an eye-witness, there is the undoubtedly very ancient and incontrovertible evidence of Miriam's song in 15<sup>21</sup>: "Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." The event may be taken as one of the most surely attested, as it is, in some ways, the most important, in Hebrew history.

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But of what character is the event ? This is the same question as we had occasion to raise about the plagues, and ought to receive the same sort of answer. The earliest forms of the story are to be found in the song (chap. 15), and in the second clause of 14<sup>21</sup>. According to these (*cf.* 15<sup>10</sup>, “Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them”) the sea was driven back by a furious east wind, which, under the topographical conditions of those regions, would be, if somewhat unusual, by no means unnatural. It is the Bible itself that thus enables us to explain the phenomenon on its physical side ; but here, as everywhere, the Bible is far more deeply interested in emphasizing the religious side of phenomena, and this is clearly brought out in both the sources referred to. The one says, “*Jehovah* caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind” ; and the other says, “*Thou* didst blow with Thy wind.” The miracle lies in its happening when and where it did. Behind it was God, and this it is that is so gratefully recognized in the songs of Miriam and Moses : “Sing ye to *Jehovah*, for He hath triumphed gloriously ; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.”

The whole story, apart from its deep significance for the history of Israel, is a brilliant illustration of the truth that man’s extremity is God’s opportunity—that with the enemy behind us, and the sea before us, and the black night about us, yet God can open up a way and lead us in safety to the other side.

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### MANNA

(Exod. 15<sup>27</sup>-16<sup>36</sup>)

The story of the wanderings from Egypt to Canaan abounds in suggestive contrasts. The first we meet at the very beginning. Only two verses separate Miriam's song, "Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously," from the statement that "the people murmured" (15<sup>21-24</sup>). The reason for the murmuring is intelligible enough—they had no water. Three days' wandering (15<sup>22</sup>) had sufficed to transform both the scenery and the popular temper. But, whatever the excuse, the fact remains; and, as they advance a little further, the murmuring begins again—this time for bread, they are dying of hunger (16<sup>2-4</sup>). How suggestive all this of the difficulty with which the life of joy and triumphant faith is sustained, and the ease with which men may forget their most signal deliverances! But it is very human, we all know what it means only too well, and the Bible is the dearer to us for its candour.

Before entering upon the story, however, we may remind ourselves that one or two critical problems are involved, which the teacher does not need to bring before his class, but which no alert student of the Bible can altogether ignore. The narrative of this chapter gathers almost exclusively round the manna; quails appear in verse 13 only to disappear immediately. On the other hand, quails and manna appear together in Numbers 11 in a very satisfactory

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connection, where the people, tired of the everlasting manna, clamour for flesh and finally receive quails to their own discomfiture. It is very probable that in some way the quails in Ex. 16 have crept in from Numbers 11; they are certainly of no importance in Ex. 16. But again, there is reason to believe that this chapter appears earlier in the book than it once did. In several places it implies that the Tabernacle or sacred tent already existed, and even the Decalogue, which is what is meant by the Testimony in verse 34. A pot of manna is to be laid up "before Jehovah" (verse 33), before the Testimony. All this implies the existence of the Tabernacle, instructions for the erection of which are first found in chapters 25-31. It would seem then to be a fair inference that this chapter, which implies the Tabernacle, once came later. It cannot, however, be too frequently or strongly emphasized that the existence of these critical problems in no way impairs the religious suggestiveness and vitality of a passage.

To return now to the story. As soon as the people were really embarked upon the great and terrible wilderness, the food problem arose. They were like to die of hunger, and at first the promise comes in a fashion decidedly vague, "I will rain bread from heaven for you." This vagueness is intentional; it is meant to stimulate curiosity as to what sort of bread this can be. But the story of the initial murmuring is not passed too lightly over; it was a sad and solemn thing to forget so soon the God who

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had so gloriously brought them up out of the land of Egypt (verse 6), and though the murmuring was actually directed against Moses and Aaron, it was in reality a challenge of God Himself, whose servants they were. More than once the point is made that God heard their murmurings (7, 8, 12). It is good for us to remember this, that God knows our need and hears our cry ; but if that cry be a murmur, He hears that too, and the consequence, as we learn from the quail story in Numbers 11, may be disastrous indeed. The mysterious food, sent in answer to their cry, would also furnish a test whether the people would be willing contentedly to trust and obey the God on whom they depended (verse 4).

The mysteriousness of the manna is very graphically described. It seemed curiously connected with the morning dew. It was as fine flakes, white (31), or pale yellow (Numbers 11<sup>7</sup>). The fullest description of what might be done with it is in Numbers 11<sup>8</sup>, "they ground it in mills, or beat it in mortars, and boiled it in pots, and made cakes of it." It had the flavour of honey, and like all God's gifts, was better than the bread for which they had asked.

The problem raised by this story is one we have already faced more than once. Was the manna miraculous in the ordinary sense of that word ? The best way to attack that problem will be to quote from Professor Driver's description of the sweet juice of a species of tamarisk which grows in the Sinaitic Peninsula. "It exudes in summer by

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night from the trunk and branches and forms small round white grains ; in the early morning it is of the consistency of wax, but the sun's rays soon melt it. The Arabs gather it in the early morning, boil it down, strain it through coarse stuff ; . . . its taste is agreeable, aromatic, and as sweet as honey." Its Arabic name to-day is practically the same as its Biblical name (*man*). One who compares this description with the account in the Bible can hardly resist the conclusion that the reference is to the same thing. But the fact that the Biblical manna is not something exceptional does not make it any the less wonderful. In the last resort all bread is bread from heaven ; and we have not properly learned the lesson of our chapter until we have allowed ourselves to be impressed by the mystery of our daily bread as the Hebrews were by their fare in the wilderness—until, wonderingly, we ask the question they asked, " What is it ? " (verse 15) ; what can this strange thing be ? and until we recognize it as a gift from God ; " *Give us our daily bread.*" Only men impressed with the wonder of the world could have written a story like this. Here, as in the story of the passover (12<sup>26-27</sup>), the characteristic Hebrew interest appears in perpetuating the memory of a great experience. A pot of this strange bread was to be preserved throughout " your generations " (verse 33).

The story of the manna is adapted to illustrate other truths, *e.g.* the sanctity of the Sabbath. The implication of the story is that the gathering of the



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manna was hard work, and this must not be done on the Sabbath day. Whatever view we may take of the statement that to enforce this point no manna fell on Sabbath and twice as much the day before—and that is partly a question of evidence and of the date of the document—there can be no doubt that to those who wrote and told such a story the Sabbath and its sanctity were peculiarly dear. That is, on any view, the heart of the story, and it is upon that that the teacher should concentrate.

Rev. C. R. Brown in his *Social Message of the Modern Pulpit* (pp. 187 f.) has well wrought out the suggestion that lies in the words, “they gathered each man according to his eating.” “Everybody worked,” he says, “there was no leisure class living idly and uselessly upon the labour of others. . . . We shall never have either industrial or spiritual peace, I am sure, until all the able-bodied people shall perform some useful labour—shall ‘gather according to their eating,’ thus rendering some genuine service to society proportioned to the share of goods which they appropriate for their personal enjoyment.”

How much guidance for our individual and social life lies within this chapter, full as it at first sight seems to be of material difficult to handle, remote from and inapplicable to our modern life. It reminds us that (1) for our daily bread we are ultimately dependent upon God, who for our sakes works His perpetual miracle; (2) that all must do their fair

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share of the world's work ; (3) that the maintenance of proper standards of work, and of the healthy and harmonious development of society, depends upon the preservation of the sanctity of the Sabbath.

### QUAILS

(Num. 11<sup>4-33</sup>)

In drawing up their programme the International Committee did well to pass at once from Exodus to Numbers. From Ex. 35 to Num. 10<sup>28</sup> the ground is almost entirely covered by ritual interests, and its literary source is known as the priestly document. Criticism has rendered an immeasurable service to the cause alike of sound historical interpretation and religious edification by analysing the Hexateuch into its constituent documents—broadly, the prophetic and the priestly. The former is the earlier ; it represents the part that interests us most, *e.g.* the stories of the patriarchs, and the kind of religious idea which it delights to exhibit and illustrate is the providence of God that so wonderfully runs through life and history. The priestly document is later, and, besides being historically therefore less important, it is supremely interested in the ritual and ecclesiastical side of religion. It does not come home so powerfully to the modern heart, and thus without any sense of break or loss we pass from the story of the golden calf to the murmuring in the wilderness.

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This chapter, however, like others we have studied, has difficulties of its own. One part of the chapter concerns quails and manna, and the manna is described in verses 7-9 as if for the first time ; but it will be remembered that we have already met with a similar story in Ex. 16. The explanation of a difficulty like this is simply that substantially the same story has been told in each of the documents, and the final editor has set the two versions of it at different points in the completed narrative. Similar difficulties gather, though not so obviously, round the other element in this chapter—the story of the appointment and equipment of the elders. Now it is not only that already in Ex. 24<sup>1</sup> seventy elders are presupposed, but in Ex. 18 there is a story, very similar in spirit and aim to Num. 11, of how Moses, overwhelmed with the multitude of the cases he has to decide, on the advice of Jethro appoints able men to relieve him of the less important matters. Of course, there are differences between the two narratives, but it is altogether probable, as many critics suppose, that essentially they are but different versions of the same incident. In both chapters Moses needs help and in both he gets it.

Again, it can hardly fail to strike one who is reading Num. 11 with any attention that the two narratives in the chapter—the quails and the appointment of the elders—are not very closely knit together. The connection is supposed to be that the murmuring of the people, occasioned by the monotony of

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the manna, so profoundly impresses Moses with a sense of the overwhelming difficulties of his post as leader that he appeals to God for help, and is finally answered by the appointment of seventy elders. Doubtless such a defence is not impossible, but the narrative certainly makes a somewhat discontinuous impression, and the simplest plan is to recognize that the two narratives of this chapter, both of which are duplicated in Exodus in different connections, had probably nothing originally to do with each other, but were blended subsequently. The quail story is told in verses 4-10, 13, 18-24*a*, 31-34, and the story of the elders in 11, 12, 14-17, 24*b*-30. These are not matters which the teacher need bring before his class, but they are necessary for his own intellectual satisfaction.

(*a*) Let us take the quail story first: Tired of the monotonous manna, the people long for flesh; and in their grumbling they ungenerously enumerate the pleasant dishes they used to enjoy in the country they loathed heartily enough so long as they were in it. Distance had lent enchantment, as it so often does. Curiously enough, although it is flesh they long for, it is the vegetable food of Egypt they dwell most on in their rosy reminiscence. Moses, as usual, takes his case to God, addressing Him with the naïveté and vigour which we have observed before (Ex. 5<sup>22-23</sup>; 32<sup>12</sup>). He then bids the people sanctify themselves (probably as in Ex. 19<sup>10</sup>, by ablutions), because Jehovah will be very near them in the wonder

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which He is about to perform—the miraculous provision of quails. It is plain that their references to Egypt have cut Moses to the heart. In order to enhance the impression of the miracle, Moses is represented as himself for the moment incredulous ; where was the flesh to come from to feed so great a multitude for a month ? But come it will, came the answer, for God is almighty ; and it will come in such quantities that the people will absolutely loathe it. That will be their punishment—to get the thing they desire until it sickens them. And so it came ; a wind brought up the quails from the sea (the Gulf of Akaba) in stupendous numbers, so that no one gathered less than one hundred bushels. The gathering was easy, as “ the quails came down tired with their long flight. Some of them may have fallen to the ground exhausted, as was frequently the case in quail swarms ; but the main body of them were hovering above the ground at a height of about one yard, and were easily netted ” (M'Neile). Verse 33 suggests that a plague immediately broke out, though what and how we are not told, but verse 20 contemplates the people as living on quail flesh for a month. There may have been different versions of their punishment, but it was punishment enough to get the thing they had clamoured for until they hated it. There is surely a profound truth here.

The appearance of the quails raises the question of the miraculous in the same way as the plagues,

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the crossing of the Red Sea, etc., and has to be disposed of in the same way, by recognizing that what we have here is a natural phenomenon with a religious interpretation. "Quails," says Professor Driver, in his *Exodus*, p. 148, "are migratory birds; and in March and April come up from Arabia and other southern countries and cross the Mediterranean in vast numbers. They always fly with the wind. When they alight, which they generally do at night, they cover the ground, and, being usually exhausted, can be captured by hand in great numbers." But the religious temper of the Hebrew historian regards this very naturally as the Lord's doing.

The story of the quails suggests (1) the disgrace, (2) the stupidity of discontent. (1) It is disgraceful to be discontented with the simple daily fare, for that too is the gift of God, and when people are really hungry they are (like Israel) thankful for it. (2) Contentment is great gain. When we get what we long for, it may turn out to be a veritable "plague."

(b) Let us now look at the story of the elders. Overwhelmed with his responsibilities as leader of the people, Moses longs and prays for relief—once more in a prayer astonishingly naïve and bold, which shows the sense of intimacy that characterized early Hebrew prayer. Moses complains of being worse off than a nurse, for he has not a child but a nation to carry. They are not his children, but Jehovah's, whose business it is therefore to care for them. For

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answer, he is instructed to bring seventy elders to the tent, and Jehovah, whose intercourse elsewhere with Moses is secret, is represented as honouring him on this occasion by coming down in person in a cloud, taking Moses' spirit and imparting it to the elders in order to equip them for their task of helping him to administer the affairs of the people. Doubtless the spirit here is conceived somewhat quantitatively; part of what Moses has is literally taken from him and given to them. But behind this ancient form is the fruitful idea that one man may be big enough to inspire a whole group of leaders, and that the success of a mighty enterprise may depend upon the power which he directly or indirectly is able to communicate. This part of the story lets us see the overwhelming impression made by the power and personality of Moses.

No less so does the sequel, only this shows him in his broadmindedness and magnanimity. Two men who were not in the original group of seventy were discovered to be inspired by the same ecstatic spirit (*cf.* 1 Sam. 10<sup>6</sup>), and Joshua wished Moses to forbid them to exercise their power. The reply of Moses is almost as wonderful as the prayer which he offered for his guilty people in Ex. 32<sup>32</sup>. He has no small notions of his own dignity, and he scorns the idea that the spirit is limited to official channels or to particular classes or persons. Let us beware of the official spirit in religion, which would lead us to reject men of proved worth and power, because their

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equipment or training has been unconventional. Certain disciples of Jesus made this very mistake, and He said to them when He found them interfering with a man who was doing beneficent work, " Forbid him not, for he that is not against you is for you " (Luke 9<sup>50</sup>). The ideal society would be one in which all were prophets, and the law was written on every heart.

### CROSSING THE JORDAN

(Josh. 3)

Israel in her wanderings has reached a point a little to the north of the Dead Sea, and nothing now lies between her and her goal but the river Jordan. Once across it the work of invasion and occupation will begin, and that great national history, which was to mean so much to the world, will have been launched. The passage of the Jordan is therefore a moment of great dramatic importance ; and with a due sense of the fitness of things all the sources from which the narrative draws dwell upon it in chaps. 3 and 4 with considerable elaboration. For if we take chapter 4 into account, the compositeness of the narrative becomes unmistakable. Already in 3<sup>17</sup>, for instance, the people are over the river ; in 4<sup>4-5</sup> the implication is that they are only about to cross ; while in 4<sup>10</sup> there is another account of their crossing. We are reminded by these and similar phenomena in the two chapters that all the sources were deeply interested in the story, which, in its broad outlines,



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is thus, by the very variety of the evidence, confirmed. We have nothing to lose and something to gain in believing that behind this and similar narratives lie more sources than one, for "at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall a thing be established."

One of the most suggestive features of the story of the crossing is that the ark goes first. This was in accordance with the regular provision made for the march, as suggested by the poetical fragment in Num. 10<sup>35</sup>—the ark went in advance ; and the reason for this is suggested in the same passage—Jehovah was in some way intimately associated with the ark. "When the ark set forward, Moses said, 'Rise up, Jehovah, and let Thine enemies be scattered'" (cf. 1 Sam. 4<sup>6-7</sup>). It is a solemn moment, and as twice before in similar crises (Ex. 19<sup>10</sup> ; Num. 11<sup>18</sup>), the people are instructed to sanctify themselves, because the presence and power of God are about to be palpably manifested. Joshua, as we should expect from chap. 1, is now the prominent figure ; he determines all the movements of the people and he is conscious of his special inspiration ; the words which he utters are none other than the words of "Jehovah your God" (verse 9). The story is so told as to show that he is the true successor of Moses (verse 7), magnified—by the successful passage of the river—in the sight of all the people (3<sup>7</sup> ; 4<sup>14</sup>). A feeling of expectancy is in the air, something of the first importance is about to happen, and Joshua,

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like a true leader, seizes the opportunity to confirm Israel's faith. What will happen at the Jordan will put beyond all doubt that the God whom Israel worships is not a dead but a very living God, who controls the forces of nature and is equally able to control the forces of history and to give Israel, after she has crossed the Jordan, victory over all her foes. Then, after curiosity has been stimulated to a point at which we can bear the strain no longer, we are definitely told that the waters of the Jordan were to be cut off—the waters that come down from above—and they were to stand in one heap (verse 13). That is, through the damming of the waters the bed of the river was to be made practically dry. This is what is meant by the strange way, the like of which Israel had not passed heretofore (verse 4)—and as at the Red Sea, the people would cross, almost on dry land. And so it happened. It was in the month of April. The river was very high. But strange to relate, at some point higher up the Jordan valley, the water was mysteriously checked; from that point, the rest of the water flowed down to the Dead Sea, so that the river-bed was practically dry; and opposite Jericho the people passed safely over to the western side, preceded by the ark, which halted in the middle till all the people were over. An event so wonderful deserved to be commemorated for all time (4<sup>21</sup>), so twelve men (3<sup>12</sup>), representing the twelve tribes, secured and set up twelve memorial stones (4<sup>2r</sup>).

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Here manifestly we have the same sort of problem as we have had to face before. Bible stories mean more to us, when they do not stand apart from, but can be related to, our own or some other historical experience. In point of fact this incident has been paralleled in the Christian era. Professor C. F. Kent, in his *Student's Old Testament* (i. 259), explains thus :

“ This version strongly suggests a landslide, which temporarily dammed the waters of the river until they again broke away the barrier and came rushing down, overflowing the banks as before (4<sup>18</sup>). The mention of the spring freshets also confirms the hypothesis of a landslide. As in the Judean account of the Exodus, Jehovah's care and love for His people was revealed by the opportune use of natural forces, rather than by what is usually called a miracle. Most interesting in this connection is the incident recounted in the history of Sultan Bibars, which occurred in 1257 A.D. It was found necessary to repair the foundations of the bridge *Jisr Damieh* in anticipation of the retreat of the Moslem army. The task seemed impossible, but on arriving at the bridge the workmen found the river-bed empty. Thus it remained for a few hours, until the work was nearly completed. Then the waters again came rushing down. The cause was a landslide higher up the river.”

The thought most persistently presented by the whole narrative is the place of God in human enterprise. His place is first—“in the beginning God.” Israel acknowledged this by sending the ark on in

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advance, and she had her reward in a signal proof of His presence, His love, and His power. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths" (Prov. 3<sup>6</sup>). "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass" (Ps. 37<sup>5</sup>). Israel had, as we see, historical experiences which justified this simple, daring faith. The last barrier to the promised land was swept away by a providence which, if it was natural, was no less supernatural. However it happened, it was the Lord's doing, and wondrous in their eyes.

### THE FALL OF JERICHO

(Josh. 5<sup>12</sup>-6<sup>27</sup>)

A peculiar interest attaches to this passage, as it describes Israel's first assault upon a Canaanite city after they had crossed the Jordan. They are now in the promised land, but their real task has only begun—the task of making this land their own, and it was two centuries at least before this was accomplished. There was many a fierce fight; but their success at Jericho in their first assault was prophetic of their ultimate triumph. The secret of their success lay in themselves, in their leaders, and in their God. They were born fighters, they were magnificently led, they went into battle with the faith that they were fighting the battles of Jehovah—their victory was a victory for their God as well—and that that God was no passive spectator, but was veritably with

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them in the fight. This is the thought which inspires the last three verses of chap. 5, where the heavenly leader, the prince of Jehovah's host, appears, in order to encourage Joshua on the eve of his perilous campaign; a really noble imagination, fitted to remind those who are fighting the battles of the Lord that they are sustained and aided by forces unseen. As it stands, this vision forms an admirable introduction to the story of the successful assault upon Jericho.

Here, however, as elsewhere, two or more literary strands have been woven together to give us our completed tale. In certain verses (*e.g.* verse 10) the signal for the shout which is to precede the storming of the city is the express command of Joshua, in other verses (*e.g.* verse 5) it is the blast of the horns. Verse 20 is an attempt to combine the two accounts, and it can hardly be denied that there is some confusion and redundancy in the resultant picture. Again, from verse 5 (and 20) we get the impression that the blast of the horns is to be the signal for the raising of the war cry; in verses 8, 9, and 13 there is a pretty continuous blowing of the horns hardly consistent with this idea, and likely to defeat the end there in view. All we need here say is that these little differences of detail not only do not invalidate, but even substantiate, the broad outlines of the story. Once we recognize the presence of two sources, other features of the story become more intelligible. For example, according to verses 13-16, the people

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marched round the city once every day for six days, and seven times on the seventh. Wellhausen has with much plausibility conjectured that there were only seven marches in all, but that one of the sources assigned the marches to seven consecutive days, the other put them all on one day, and both were ultimately combined. In either case, the point of importance is that the city was taken after the seventh march, and most probably on the seventh day, which, being in all likelihood the Sabbath, was peculiarly fitted for an exhibition of the power of the God whom they worshipped.

The stratagem by which the city was captured is represented in verses 1-5 as suggested to Joshua by Jehovah—which is the Hebrew way of expressing the idea that all wise thoughts, in military tactics, as in life generally, come from divine inspiration. Here, as in the previous story of the crossing of the Jordan, the ark, symbolic of the presence of Jehovah, is in a position of great prominence; only this time it is not in the front, but in the middle of the procession organized to march round the city, preceded by seven priests with trumpets or horns, and with the army proper to the front and rear. They are to go round the city seven times; perhaps both the number seven and the marching round the city, weaving as it were a doom about it, may have been dimly associated with the idea of magic influences. All of a sudden, at the end of the seventh march, the wild war-cry was raised by Israel, whether at the

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command of Joshua or on the blast of the trumpet, and even yet we can almost hear in it an echo of the terror that these impetuous men of the desert awoke in the cultured inhabitants of the Canaanite towns. At the fierce shout and the loud blast the walls of the city are said to have fallen down flat, literally "in their place"; the Israelites rushed in, captured the city, and devoted to destruction every living thing, human beings and animals alike, all but Rahab and her household, who was spared for the valuable service she had rendered to Israel (chap. 2). The city was reduced to ashes, and a curse pronounced upon the man who would rebuild it (*cf.* 1 Kings 16<sup>34</sup>).

How are we to explain this incident? It used to be said that the walls fell so readily because they were weak, and the vibratory motion of the march rendered the foundations insecure. Recent excavations have conclusively disproved such an explanation by showing that the walls were so massive and strong as to evoke the astonishment of modern architects. The real explanation is suggested by the facts which Principal Sir George Adam Smith has so forcefully stated in his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (pp. 267 f.). "Jericho," he says, "is a city surrounded by resources. Yet in war she has always been easily taken. That her walls fell down at the sound of Joshua's trumpets is no exaggeration, but the soberest summary of all her history." Her weakness, he points out, was due to two causes, her

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vulnerable topographical position, and the great heat which enervated and degraded the inhabitants of the district. Thus the seemingly miraculous element in the story must be regarded in the same way as in the similar stories we have already dealt with. The impression is that the walls miraculously fell at the sound of the trumpet. But is it not clear that this must be interpreted as the language of poetry, like the similar incident in 10<sup>12f.</sup>, whose poetic origin is frankly acknowledged? The religious meaning behind the poetic form is that no walls can stand before Jehovah when He fights for His people. The story is so told as to emphasize the mysterious presence of the divine help, but only a dull imagination would suppose that it implied the absence of fighting. The victory was complete and very likely easy, but it was at least contested. We are fortunate to possess in 24<sup>11</sup> interesting and quite incidental testimony to the fact that there was fighting, "Ye went over Jordan, and came to Jericho; and the men of Jericho fought against you." A battle there was, though perhaps not a very fierce one; but the poets and historians of Israel always and lovingly dwell rather on the help given them by their own God-man of war (Ex. 15<sup>3</sup>), than on the prowess and tactics of the human warriors, though these are not forgotten.

The lesson is that the secret of victory lies in religion (notice the prominence of the ark and the priests) and effort, in fighting and faith. The



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strongest walls go down before the enthusiastic assault of men, who believe in themselves, their cause, and their God.

### GOD'S CARE OF ELIJAH

(1 Kings 17<sup>1-18</sup>)

The time is roughly about 850 B.C., the leading characters are the prophet Elijah and King Ahab. It is interesting to find prophet and king so often associated in Hebrew history, sometimes as collaborators, often as opponents; already this association has been illustrated by the cases of Samuel and Saul, Nathan and David, Ahijah and Jeroboam, and it will be again illustrated by Elisha and Joash, Isaiah and Ahaz, Isaiah and Hezekiah, Jeremiah and Jehoiakim, Jeremiah and Zedekiah. As Jehovah, the God of the people, was necessarily interested in national affairs, so must also His representatives, the prophets, be. It is this perpetual and lively contact with social and national problems that invests the prophets with their perennial human interest.

During the sixty years or so intervening between the revolution of Jeroboam (937) and the accession of Ahab (875) Israel had passed through many stormy political experiences and had even experienced three changes of dynasty. Partly, perhaps, to advance Israel's trade, and partly to secure support against the encroachments of Syria on the north east,

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Ahab had leagued himself with Phœnicia by marrying Jezebel, a Phœnician princess (16<sup>311</sup>). According to the etiquette of those days, this involved the recognition of the god of Phœnicia (*cf.* the results of Solomon's marriage with foreign women in chap. 11). At once Elijah appears upon the scene to hurl his imperious protest at the king. His very name, which means "Jehovah is my God," suggests his intolerance of any other god, and his sworn hostility to compromise. It is a piece of great good fortune that his story is so fully and dramatically told, for the crisis through which he lived is one of the most important in Hebrew history, and he himself is one of the mightiest figures in the history of religion.

Emerging from his native wilds in Gilead east of Jordan, he suddenly appears before Ahab (probably in his palace at Samaria), announces a drought—no doubt in punishment for the king's recognition of the Phœnician Baal (16<sup>32</sup>), and then as suddenly disappears across the Jordan. There, in that wild region, through which ran the torrent Cherith, we are given to understand that he was miraculously fed by ravens. Rationalistic attempts have been made to reduce this beautiful religious poetry to the level of bald historical prose by interpreting the word rendered "ravens" as merchants or Arabs; but it is only fair to interpret such stories in the spirit in which they were written—the spirit of poetry and religious imagination. The important thing for us,

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as interpreters, is to catch the inspiration of the large faith in the divine care which breathes through the narrative, that faith which saw Elijah to be mysteriously sustained in so lonely and unpromising a spot.

This is also the chief point of the next story (8-16) in which we find Elijah in Phœnicia (at a town about ten miles south of Sidon) supported by a widow woman so poor that she was herself on the verge of starvation. She was about the last person from whom he might have expected to obtain hospitality, first because of her own utter destitution, and again because she was a worshipper of that very god whose worship he was giving his life to destroy. Very touching is the meeting of these two so very different figures upon a common human level—the Hebrew prophet and the Phœnician widow, the one the victim of persecution, the other of poverty. Nothing seemed more unlikely than that the widow could have helped the prophet, but here again the miracle happens—the miracle which is perpetually happening to those who can believe. In some mysterious way they are sustained. The Lord is faithful and mindful of His own, He will not leave or forsake those who trust Him. Elijah trusted his God, the widow trusted Elijah, and both are carried mysteriously but triumphantly through those awful days of drought and sorrow.

The broad lesson of both stories is that God watches over those who trust Him. Evermore they

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find themselves strongly but surely supported upon an arm that stretches down, as it were, from an unseen world. The spot may be lonely, as at Cherith, but God and His providence are not far away. The resources may, like the widow's, be so slender as to be almost invisible, but help comes to those who believe in its coming. Wherever they go, they find the way prepared for them; in unexpected places and through the most unlikely persons they find continuous tokens of God's care.

Here, and indeed throughout the whole story of Elijah, the miraculous plays so large a part that ordinary people like ourselves are tempted to feel that the story can have little relation to their lives and little meaning for them. We must not allow ourselves, however, to forget that it is just this very Elijah who is described in the New Testament as a "man of like passions" or feelings or nature with ourselves, and that therefore we can learn much from the story of his courage and his faith. And if any one should find difficulty in believing the stories of this chapter exactly in the form in which they are told, he should go behind the stories to the great ideas which these stories illustrate and embody. Both those who find them easy and those who find them difficult can heartily agree concerning the truths they were intended to teach, some of which are these: (1) The man of faith ought to be a man of courage. Note how fearlessly Elijah faces Ahab, as in chap. 18 he faces the prophets of Baal. (2) God

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often causes help to arise for us from the most unpromising and unexpected quarters. In the lonely places of Gilead far from human haunts and help the prophet is sustained in life, and again in hostile Phœnicia he is strangely supported by the slender resources of a poor widow woman. Wherever he goes he finds the way prepared for him ; in unexpected places and through the most unlikely persons he finds continual tokens of God's care. (3) Here also is the lesson of toleration. Elijah and the widow represent hostile types ; yet Elijah, persecuted in his own land, finds a cordial reception at the hands of this foreign woman. Deeper than all our national divisions are our broad human relationships, and this is what we sorely need to recognize to-day. It is worthy of note that this is the thing that interests our Lord in the story (Luke 4<sup>251</sup>). He makes no allusion to its miraculous features, but He rejoices to note the kinship of soul between these two people of hostile lands.

### ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

(1 Kings 18)

There is no more dramatic chapter in the Old Testament than this. Through the marriage of Ahab with a Phœnician princess, Hebrew religion was menaced, as we saw, by Phœnician religion, and this great chapter describes the dramatic clash of their representative figures—Elijah on the one hand,

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solitary champion of the Jehovah religion, and the Baal prophets, champions of the Phœnician Melkart, on the other. Incidentally there is revealed the tremendous contrast between the two religions—the one quiet, restrained, and dignified, working by spiritual means, the other wild, tumultuous, and fierce, making its appeal to the deity by loud shouting and cruel lacerations of the flesh.

The scene of the conflict was Carmel, the noble mountain which juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, on which was a sanctuary of Jehovah—selected perhaps because of its proximity to Phœnicia. It was to this spot that Elijah directed Ahab to summon Israel and the prophets of the Baal. Hardly less interesting than the collision of Elijah with the Baal prophets is the clash with Ahab which preceded it. These two mighty antagonists had just met—Ahab, who stood for a political solution of national problems, even though it should involve religious compromise, and Elijah, to whom religion was everything, the implacable foe of compromise. Each accuses the other of ruining Israel. It is then that Elijah proposes the convention on Carmel, at which the powers of the rival gods can be tested. Or rather, the question to be decided was this : which was the real God—Jehovah or Baal ? With reference, apparently, to the fantastic limping dance round the altar alluded to in verse 26, Elijah asked the assembled throng how long they were going to limp on both knees ; probably in the Baal worship they

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danced round the altar, limping on one knee. But they cannot have it both ways, says Elijah ; it must be the one god or the other. Compromise is the one intolerable thing. For political reasons Ahab had decided for compromise ; but the government has no right to decide the religion of a people, and it is significant that Elijah appeals beyond Ahab to this representative assembly of the people, in the conviction that the people should, on the evidence of facts, be allowed to decide for themselves.

Elaborate preparations are made for the test. Then the Baal prophets begin their appeal. All day they cry, they gash themselves till blood spurts, but all in vain. The scorn which Elijah pours upon their god shows only what a helpless nonentity he is ; for nothing happens. Then Elijah comes forth in solitary grandeur, repairs the ruined altar of Israel's god, and offers a solemn prayer to Him to vindicate His own and His servant's honour ; and " then the fire of Jehovah fell." Could there be any doubt now as to who was the real God ? Convinced, the people acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah in repeated shouts : " Jehovah "—not the Baal—" He is God ; Jehovah, He is God." Instantly the grim prophet commanded the slaughter of the Baal prophets, and beside the river that ran near the foot of the mountain they were slain. Now that the obstacle to the favour of Jehovah was removed, the rain might again be sent upon the thirsty land, and soon it fell in torrents.

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The story is as full of problems as of interest. What happened on Carmel—a lightning flash, or what? It is impossible to say. Most scholars believe that we are here in presence of a miraculous event, scientifically inexplicable indeed, but religiously necessary, because this was a crisis in the history of the kingdom of God, and God, who is a living God, interposed in the interests of His kingdom. Others, starting from the narrative in 2 Kings 9 and 10, point out that it was Jehu, inspired by Elisha, who put an end to Baal worship in Israel (10<sup>28</sup>; *cf.* 1 Kings 19<sup>16-18</sup>); but, as the ultimate impulse to the attack upon the Baal worship, which ended in its destruction, came from Elijah, such scholars believe that the narrative in 1 Kings 18 dramatically concentrates the interest upon Elijah, ascribing to him the completion of the movement which, historically, he only initiated and inspired, much as the later historians attribute to Joshua the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 21<sup>43-45</sup>), though the earlier sources make it quite clear that that conquest was, as we should expect, gradual and protracted. Much could be said for this view. The Hebrews were fond of telescoping a long movement into a single event or personality; the Law, *e.g.*, was ascribed to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Proverbs to Solomon, though each of these books is the result of centuries of development.

This is a point, however, for the historian, and not for the Sunday school class, which is concerned



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chiefly with the religious value and teaching of the narrative. The chapter is fairly aglow with religious life and power. In intensely vivid and personal form it illustrates (1) the courage of faith. Fearlessly Elijah faces Ahab, who has been hunting for him long and relentlessly; fearlessly he challenges the hundreds of prophets of Baal; and he can do this because he has infinite confidence in Jehovah, his God, whose name he bears. In all his life and enterprise, he is conscious of "standing before" Jehovah of hosts (17<sup>1</sup>). Again the story illustrates (2) the folly, indeed the ultimate impossibility, of compromise. We cannot be on two opposite sides at the same time. There is nothing that the Bible detests more than the attempt to serve two masters. The thing simply cannot be done, said Jesus; not "ye should not," but "ye cannot" (Matt. 6<sup>24</sup>); on those who try the doom is pronounced, "I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3<sup>16</sup>).

### ELIJAH'S FLIGHT

(1 Kings 19)

Here we have another great picture drawn by a master hand—a picture even more entrancing, in some ways, than the last; for it reveals the mighty Elijah, who has just on Carmel displayed an almost superhuman courage, as a man of like moods and feelings with ourselves, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, subject, as we, to despondency, despair,

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and even fear, according to the Greek version of 19<sup>3</sup>, which reads, "and he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life." In the reaction which followed his brilliant triumph his fear is not to be greatly wondered at, for the terrible Jezebel, whose prophets he had slain, was upon his track. Her threat, in the Greek version, is very drastic; it begins, "If you are Elijah, I am Jezebel," or "As surely as you are Elijah and I am Jezebel, so may the gods do to me, etc." Her cruel treatment of Naboth (21<sup>7</sup>) shows that she was quite capable of keeping her word; and at once Elijah fled across the border to Judah, and through Judah to the great and terrible wilderness beyond, and laid him down to die. But God has yet other things to teach him, another vision to grant him, and he must not die yet. So we read that, as before at Cherith (17<sup>6</sup>), he was miraculously sustained and strengthened, and in time he came to Horeb the mount of God.

Why should he have gone there? We must remember that throughout this part of the narrative he appears almost as a second Moses. He, like Moses, is the protagonist of Jehovah's cause; he, like him, received a great and heartening revelation (Ex. 33 and 34); he received it in the same place—for Sinai and Horeb are names in different documents for the same mountain—and he received it to the accompaniment of similar natural phenomena (Ex. 19). The original covenant between Jehovah and Israel was made at Sinai or Horeb; this covenant, he

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sorrowfully complains, has been broken by the unholy compromise with Baal ; and, in view of all this, his visit to Horeb, the seat of ancient covenant associations, is very intelligible. But there may also have been another and more personal reason. Sinai was Jehovah's ancient home ; and, in common with other early Hebrews (*cf.* Judges 5<sup>41</sup>), Elijah may have regarded it as still, in a very real sense, Jehovah's home. Doubtless Canaan was now His land, and the altars there erected were His altars ; but He may have been thought to be more really present on the distant mountain where He had first made Himself known ; and, as there is nothing Elijah now needs more than a new revelation of the God he is serving, he goes to the spot where that God is peculiarly present.

When he reaches the sacred mountain, and enters a cave—perhaps the cave in which, centuries before, Moses had stood (Ex. 33<sup>22</sup>)—he has the strangest experiences, storm, earthquake, fire, but not the God of whom he is in search. Then there follows the sound of a gentle whisper or breeze, and after that comes the vision of the future, in which the triumph of Jehovah's cause is seen to be accomplished, though not indeed by Elijah, yet by the agents whom Elijah is commissioned to appoint (*vv.* 15–17). It is common to interpret this vision as a rebuke of Elijah's violent methods (18<sup>40</sup>) and a reminder of the power of gentleness. But the fierce terms of the commission, which opens up another

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vista of slaughter, show that that cannot have been the meaning. Rather, it is designed to suggest the serene might and majesty of the God whom Elijah serves. Those mighty forces are His heralds, they go before Him ; but He Himself abides, like those who trust Him, in "quietness and confidence." The future is His, His triumph is sure, and, though Elijah will not live to see it, it will be accomplished by the agents whom he was commissioned to anoint, one of whom (Elisha) he was privileged to inspire. The vision therefore rebukes not his violence, but his despondency.

In the wilderness beneath the juniper tree, where he had cast himself down to die, Elijah comes closer to us than in the titanic struggle on Carmel. From the story we learn (1) that success is frequently not so complete as we imagine. No gigantic evil is ever abolished by a single blow or in a single day. After the most brilliant and seemingly decisive triumph has been won, Jezebel may be almost as powerful as ever. (2) Brilliant success may be followed by the deepest despondency. The sudden emergence of new facts (like the threat of Jezebel), which we had not anticipated, may hurl us from the pinnacle to the stones. Psychologically, there is fine realism in all this. (3) The cure for despondency is a new vision of God and of His majestic purpose, which surely and quietly stretches away into the future. We triumph by hopefully allying ourselves with that. (4) We learn also the power and value of sacred

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associations. God is everywhere, but there are places in this world where He has come peculiarly near to nations and to men. Every life should have its Horeb, by visiting which faith is revived, and the drooping soul refreshed.

### ELIJAH'S ASCENSION

(2 Kings 2<sup>1-12</sup>)

Elijah's career abounds in dramatic incidents, and it closes in the most dramatic of all ; only we must remember, as we read the brilliant narrative, that it has to be interpreted in the spirit in which it was written—rather as sublime imaginative poetry than as bald historical prose.

The air is heavy with anticipation and mystery. Elijah, Elisha, the sons of the prophets, are all conscious that the end is nigh. The phrase "sons of the prophets" really means members of the prophetic guilds, groups of men—though not exactly like the great prophets of later times, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.—who gathered round some great "head" like Elisha for stimulus and instruction. They lived together in various parts of the country (6<sup>1</sup>), and for their support depended partly on charity (4<sup>42</sup> ; 5<sup>22</sup>). Elijah had all his life been solitary ; unlike Elisha, he had never had anything to do with such a band ; and naturally he would not wish to have them present when the great hour of his departure should come. He does not even desire the presence of his own

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disciple and successor, Elisha, he wishes to face the end alone ; and as he travels south from Gilgal, seven miles or so to Bethel, and from there again to Jericho, he repeatedly requests Elisha to leave him, but the faithful disciple refuses. At last they reach the Jordan, whose waters are said to have parted when smitten by Elijah's mantle, to which we are to conceive that the mysterious power was communicated which resided in the prophet himself (*cf.* Mark 5<sup>28-29</sup>). Thus they cross together to the eastern side, the side on which Elijah was most at home. The supreme moment has now come. About to leave this world forever, the great prophet, anxious to bequeath to his disciple the best legacy within his power, asked him to say what he most desired. Elisha, who regards Elijah as his spiritual father (verse 12), nobly asked for nothing but a double portion of the prophet's spirit—a petition which showed that he regarded himself as the prophet's eldest son, whose share of an inheritance was by law twice that of any of the other sons (Deut. 21<sup>17</sup>). Without this spirit he could not hope to prosecute the mighty work initiated by Elijah. His subsequent career is the proof that this spirit for which he craved did indeed become his, for many of the wonderful exploits attributed to him are manifestly modelled on those of the greater Elijah.

The request was a hard one ; but whether it could be granted or no would depend entirely on the petitioner himself. Was he a man of vision ? Could

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he see the unseen? If so, then he was worthy, and the power he asked would be his. The crisis was drawing near. Soon his beloved master would be surrounded by mysterious invisible forces from another world—those horses and chariots of fire which the sealed eyes of ordinary mortals could not see. If his eye could pierce the unseen, then he was a worthy son of the mighty father, and the power would be his. When the sublime moment came, in that hour of whirlwind and storm which so fittingly closed the stormy career of Elijah, he saw the heavenly horses and chariot, and became that instant heir to the great work of the master whom he had lost. It is worthy of note that, though the scene was overpowering, no sound of fear or terror escapes Elisha's lips, only the cry of infinite loneliness and sorrow, as he saw the great master depart who had been so much to him and to Israel.

This parting scene is magnificent, all the more so when we realize its implications. The horses and chariots of fire are part of the unseen armies of the Lord; they point ultimately back to the heavenly forces which were said, three centuries before in the glorious song of Deborah (Judges 5<sup>20</sup>), to have fought on the Lord's side against Sisera. The meaning of the passage therefore is that when Elijah leaves this world, he but goes away to continue his battle for the Lord; fighter on the earth, he is a fighter still.

Here again, as in the earlier Elijah stories, every thoughtful reader is confronted by grave and per-

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plexing problems. It helps us, as has been pointed out before, to remind ourselves in all such perplexities that there are two kinds of questions which may be asked : (1) What are the facts of the story ? and (2) What are the ideas illustrated by and inspiring the story ? With the first question the historian is more particularly concerned, but the religious man with the second. Biblical historians do not write primarily to record facts, but to drive home religious truths ; and so Bible readers do the Bible writers the highest honour when they read with a view to ascertaining what were the truths which those writers were eager to illustrate and enforce. For, as Thomas à Kempis truly says, "each part of the Scripture is to be read with the same spirit wherewith it was written."

One hesitates to reduce the thoughts of this great imaginative passage to the level of unimaginative prose ; but these three may be at least indicated. (1) The workers die, but the work goes on. It seems impossible that Elijah could be replaced ; yet when he passes, his work and his spirit are continued in Elisha. No matter who is taken, God never leaves Himself without workers and witnesses. (2) The good man is surrounded in death by spiritual presences, he is "taken" to God—taken, we may believe, to continue elsewhere the work he had begun and left unfinished here. (3) Vision is the condition of power. What a man does in this world ultimately depends upon what he has the power to see. The



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truly mighty man is he who sees and trusts the unseen forces that shape history, that hover near and guard the destinies of those who believe in them. A fine illustration of this in the career of Elisha is the quiet confidence with which he faced an assault of Israel's earthly foes, because he saw the encompassing heavenly hosts which the unenlightened eyes of his servant failed to see (6<sup>15-17</sup>). So in the confused world of to-day the effective men are those who know that there are other forces in the world than their own, unseen spiritual powers working for the higher welfare of humanity.

### ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

(2 Kings 4<sup>8-37</sup>)

The story of the raising of the dead child, which inevitably recalls the similar miracle wrought by Elijah (1 Kings 17<sup>17-24</sup>), illustrates what is meant by Elisha's petition (2 Kings 2<sup>9</sup>) that he should have a double portion of Elijah's spirit ; he is his spiritual son and first born, and can do things like those which his master had done.

Elisha, like Elijah, was definitely connected with Mount Carmel (verse 25) and on his visits from his home in Gilgal (2<sup>1</sup>, 4<sup>38</sup>) to Carmel, he would pass by Shunem, which was about five miles north of Jezreel. In this village he was hospitably entertained as a " holy man of God " by a wealthy woman who belonged to a powerful clan, and had furnished

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for him a permanent chamber in a way which for those days would be considered luxurious. Eager to reward so generous a hospitality, the prophet took steps to discover through his servant Gehazi what the woman's heart was most set on, and he offered to speak for her to the king or the captain of the host. The story of Naboth (1 Kings 21) teaches us how easy it was for unscrupulous persons in authority to make themselves masters of anything they coveted; neither property nor life was safe when their cupidity was stirred; and Elisha's suggestion to the woman was really an offer to secure official protection for herself and her property, should she deem such to be necessary. But apparently she had no need of it, she declines the offer with the words, "I dwell (securely) among my own people," which means that she was a member of a powerful clan which was quite capable of looking after itself and its members.

But though she needed no protection, she longed, as Gehazi surmised, for a child; and Elisha, in virtue of his miraculous prophetic endowment, promised her a son, who in due time was born. But every such joy carries with it the possibility of sorrow, and one day the child was smitten by sun-stroke. He was carried to his mother, but he died in her lap at noon. The resourceful woman determined at once to visit the prophet, but first she laid the child on the prophet's bed, taking care to shut the door after her, perhaps to keep the spirit, which the

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ancients believed to hover in the neighbourhood of the body which it had just left, from getting away. Then she asked her husband for the use of an ass to ride to Mount Carmel for an interview with the prophet. The husband was greatly surprised that she should visit the prophet on a day that was neither new moon nor sabbath. From this incidental statement we gather that it was customary to go to the prophets on these holy days. Unfortunately we do not know what happened at such gatherings, but it is not unnatural to suppose that the prophet imparted some sort of religious instruction or stimulus to those who came to him. So she started on her long ride of twenty-two miles or so to Carmel.

She would communicate her sorrow only to Elisha, not to his servant Gehazi whom Elisha had sent out to meet her. In the roughness of the servant and the tenderness of the prophet we are reminded of the difference in the treatment meted by Jesus and His disciples respectively to those who brought to Him the little children (Mark 10<sup>13f.</sup>). Understanding the bitterness of her heart which came out in words that sounded almost like reproach, Elisha ordered Gehazi to go to the woman's house with all speed, and lay his staff on the child's face. Here again we meet perhaps with another ancient idea. The staff, like the mantle which divided the waters, may have been supposed to possess in some measure the supernatural power of the prophet and possibly the power to effect resuscitation. But the

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staff effected nothing. Fortunately, however, the mother had been resolute enough to compel Elisha to accompany her home. It is significant that when he entered the room, like Elijah in a similar hour (1 Kings 17<sup>20f.</sup>), he prayed; and again, like Elijah, he used means. He stretched himself upon the child and thus by mysterious contact brought back the spirit which had fled.

This narrative, throbbing with human interest, gives us a glimpse into some curious ideas and usages of ancient religion and life, and, like the whole cycle to which it belongs, it raises difficult problems. Was this, *e.g.*, a real resuscitation? Or in estimating its historicity, are we to take into account the fact that it occurs in a cycle of stories which reflect a mind that found no difficulty in believing that iron could float (6<sup>6</sup>)? To whatever decision our critical judgment may incline us, behind all the difficulties three fruitful ideas stand out luminously clear. (1) The duty of hospitality. Hospitality is its own reward, but it not seldom brings other rewards in its train. The love for the guest which it expresses when it is genuine begets in the guest gratitude to his host, and this gratitude may some day have an opportunity of expressing itself in welcome and tangible ways. (2) The power and resourcefulness of mother-love (*cf.* the beautiful story of Rizpah in 2 Sam. 21). The father in this story cuts a somewhat sorry figure beside his heroic and resolute wife. It is she who shows the power of initiative and

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execution, who hopes all, believes all, and does all. (3) The power of personal contact. The staff could not revive the child, but the living man could. It is a most suggestive contrast. There can be no adequate substitute for personal contact. The direct influence of a strong good man upon those who come into contact with him is as life to the dead. Teachers and preachers would multiply their influence immeasurably if they would only remember this—that no gift is so precious or effective as the gift of themselves.

### ELISHA HEALS NAAMAN THE SYRIAN

(2 Kings 5)

This chapter furnishes us with proof that Elisha was possessed of a spirit and power not unlike his master's. We know that he was a great political figure; here he comes before us as healer, and it is pleasant to think that his power was exercised upon a foreigner (Luke 4<sup>27</sup>)—the military chief of the nation which had raided and humiliated Israel. Indeed, it was the little girl victim of one of these raids who put the general on the way of his cure. Little things often lead to great results. It was her kind and thoughtful words to her mistress on behalf of her master—though he was the conqueror of her country and she was his captive—that set in motion the series of events by which Naaman was ultimately brought into the healing presence of Elisha.

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The exquisite story is told with such simplicity as to render comment all but superfluous. We call attention to one or two less obvious points. Note (1) the dignity which throughout the narrative attaches to Elisha. He does not go to the king of Israel, he sends ; nor does he go to Naaman, he does not even see him personally when he arrives. This aloofness in a prophet seems to commend itself to the narrator, who doubtless thought it enhanced his impressiveness. (2) The character of Naaman is skilfully drawn. At first he regards his treatment by the Hebrew prophet as a series of studied insults ; he is kept standing at the door, and Elisha will not even condescend to see him ; the cure suggested is contemptibly simple ; the river which is to effect it belongs to the hated country which he has conquered. Then his petulance and ill-humour give place, when he has taken his servants' sensible advice, to abounding gratitude. (3) There are many reminders within the passage that we are moving in the region of ancient Semitic ideas, *e.g.* (*a*) the healing influence attributed to sacred waters, like the Jordan, or the rivers of Damascus ; (*b*) the practice of the magical healers of those days, which (*cf.* verse 11) was to call aloud the name of the god, and then to wave the hand in the direction of the sanctuary or holy "place," thus summoning, as it were, the miraculous powers of the god to the sick man who needed them ; (*c*) the idea that disease, like a material thing, could be removed from one person and put upon another ;

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(d) most important, the restriction of a national god to his own land—Naaman imagines (verse 17) that he can truly worship Jehovah, the God of Israel, only upon the soil of Israel, two cartloads of which he therefore arranges to have brought to Syria.

The most obvious, though not the least important, lesson of the story is the duty of kindness to the needy, whoever and wherever they be. The girl was living in the home of the man who had conquered her country and carried her into exile, and she might naturally have been excused for indifference to his fate. But though he was a foreigner and an enemy, his sore need appealed to her, and she set in motion the forces which resulted in his cure. The world needs more of this spirit to-day, the spirit which transcends national boundaries and small patriotisms and aims at a world-citizenship in which the needs of any, whatever be his country, will constitute a call upon all others who can heal and help. We could look forward to the future of the world with less misgiving if the nations which are able were also willing to help and heal the nations which are crippled in their economic and political life. Much of the point of this fine story is missed if we do not realize that Naaman and the little maid belonged to different and hostile nations.

Elisha, Naaman, and Gehazi form three admirable character studies. (1) From Elisha's treatment of Naaman we learn the simplicity of true greatness.

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Naaman had expected magic formulæ, elaborate and mysterious remedies. But such displays are for quacks, and truly great men, like Elisha, do not stoop to them. The greatest men are the simplest men and the best cures are the simple cures. Men of the highest kind of power detest fuss and gratuitous mystery ; they do their work with direct and unassuming simplicity. (2) Naaman's conduct suggests (a) the péril of pride. Through his conceit, he came very near remaining a leper to the end of his days. Pride shuts out from many a blessing. (b) The duty of gratitude to God and man. Rejoicing in his cure, Naaman at once took practical steps to show his gratitude to Elisha and Elisha's God. So should we, too, always be grateful to those who have helped us and to the " God from whom all blessings flow." There are times when it is a crime to have a short memory. (3) Gehazi illustrates the hatefulness of avarice, which is the leprosy of the soul. Elisha, the real benefactor, did not work his cure for money. The terrible doom of Gehazi shows how utterly detestable is avarice to the soul of a good man. Money is in itself a morally neutral thing, capable of much good or infinite evil, according to the spirit of its possessor ; but the love of it withers the soul. When Gehazi adopted his mean and lying device to secure the present which Elisha had refused, he was a leper already.



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### ELISHA'S HEAVENLY DEFENDERS

(2 Kings 6<sup>8-23</sup>)

- Religion has been defined as the power to see the unseen. This aspect of religion is strikingly illustrated by the story of Elisha and the quiet courage he displayed when surrounded by enemies who had been expressly commissioned by their king to effect his capture. The incident is connected with the wars which were continually being waged at this period between Syria and Israel—wars in which Elisha, prophet though he was, played a conspicuous and patriotic part. Already we have seen him, in his relations with Gehazi, possessed of an uncanny knowledge (5<sup>26</sup>) ; in this narrative again he seems to be possessed of secret and mysteriously acquired information about Syria's plans and the movements of her troops—information so accurate that the king of Syria is inclined to suspect treachery among his own men. He determines to capture Elisha, and with a large army he surrounds Dothan, where the prophet then happened to be—a town ten miles north of Samaria, the capital of the country. Escape seemed impossible. Elisha's servant was timid and perplexed. But Elisha, who had a vision of encompassing heavenly hosts invisible, remained calm and unafraid ; and soon the prophet's prayer, and doubtless, too, the inspiration of his example, brought to his servant also the vision which filled his timid heart with peace and courage. The Syrians, like the

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servant, were blind to the unseen forces—miraculously blinded, so the story runs ; and Elisha is represented as leading them into Samaria, when lo ! they discover, with now opened eyes, that they are in the heart of the enemy's capital. The king of Israel would willingly have taken advantage of them, but Elisha would not hear of this ; on his advice they were not only spared but right royally entertained.

Prayer is prominent in this passage, but (1) its chief lesson is the practical value of vision. (a) There are other forces in the world than those which we can see with our eyes ; and in times of stress and danger, what a comfort it is to be able to believe in their presence and in their power to protect us. Though these armies of God were invisible, to Elisha they were even more real than the armies of flesh and blood, and he was confident that "they that are with us are more than they that are with them." This is the secret of all quiet endurance and patient courage ; Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11<sup>27</sup>). (b) One of the most notable consequences of this vision and this trust in it is its power to emancipate us from fear. The servant is flurried and anxious because he does not see it ; Elisha is calm and fearless because he sees it. The one sees only the danger ; the other, seeing also the unseen Defender, can say to his timid companion, "Fear not." (2) The end of the story suggests the duty of generosity to those who are in our power. We are always bound by the laws of courtesy and

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humanity to those whom the fortunes of life or competition or war have placed at our mercy. It is never right to be cruel. The way of kindness and conciliation is a far more sure and excellent way to victory.

The modern world has not yet fully learned the wisdom of this lesson taught by a Hebrew prophet and practised by a Hebrew king nearly 2800 years ago. It is easy to exercise a grim and unrelenting justice, it is harder to tread the path of magnanimity. And yet, in the end, it is magnanimity that pays. Thanks to a magnanimous policy, a Boer general who fought the British a little over twenty years ago is now one of the most trusted and influential statesmen of the empire. Would not such an experiment in magnanimity be worth repeating to-day?

The great world war and the peace which has followed it have furnished us with illustrations of both these points—the wisdom of believing in the unseen moral and spiritual forces of the world, and the wisdom of a humane and conciliatory policy, with the consequent folly of a policy ungenerous, where not vindictive. Cruelty towards a helpless foe adds fuel to the flame of hate.

## THE DEN OF LIONS

(Dan. 6)

The book of Daniel was written to strengthen the faith of men who were suffering bitter persecution

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for the religion of the fathers, and this general purpose is happily illustrated by the vivid and familiar story of Daniel (chap. 6). The Hebrews were fond of telling how their countrymen came to posts of highest dignity and power in foreign lands; and, like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel had reached a position of supreme eminence in the government of the Babylonian empire. This drew upon him the jealousy of the other high officials, a jealousy enhanced by the fact that he was an alien, and they plotted his destruction. His public record, however, was so unimpeachable that he could be successfully attacked only on the ground of his religion. They accordingly induced the unsuspecting king to establish a stringent interdict forbidding any of his subjects to offer a petition or prayer to any power in heaven or earth except to himself for the space of a month, and any who violated this interdict were to be cast into a den of lions. As Oriental monarchs were accustomed to adulation, honours, and titles which amounted almost to worship, this decree would by no means have seemed so monstrous to the ancient world as it seems to us.

Daniel was well aware that this decree was practically his death warrant, but this did not in the least appal him or affect the habits of his religious life. On the flat roof of his house there was a chamber with latticed windows, such as may still be seen in the East to-day, and these windows faced Jerusalem. To a devout Jew Jerusalem, and especially the temple,

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was the most important spot in all the world, for Jehovah, though the God of all the earth, was believed to have made it in a unique sense His home. Consequently nothing was more natural than that worshippers should turn to it in prayer (1 Kings 8<sup>44</sup>). So in his roof chamber, whose windows faced Jerusalem, Daniel, nothing daunted by the decree, regularly went on his knees three times a day (*cf.* Ps. 55<sup>17</sup>) and prayed; and it is worth noting that special mention is made of his thanksgiving. The awful fate which now seemed so certain did not dull his capacity for praise and gratitude.

This was the hour for which Daniel's jealous rivals had been waiting. They denounced him to the king as a deliberate law-breaker, and demanded the extreme penalty. The king, who saw the trap too late, did what he could—but all in vain—to save Daniel; but after a night of sleepless anguish he went to the pit and discovered with joy beyond measure that Daniel was still alive—saved by his God from the cruel lions and the still more cruel men. Then the tables were turned. The king delivered the enemies of Daniel over to the fate which they had contrived for him, and he made a decree that the God of Daniel who had proved His power in so marvellous a way should be honoured and feared throughout his dominions as the living God whose kingdom knows no end.

(1) Incidentally we learn the folly and the doom of envy. Jealous of Daniel's gifts and position, the

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Persian officials plotted his ruin, only in the end to find themselves and not him torn to pieces in the lions' den. With great frequency and power the Old Testament portrays this nemesis which runs through human affairs, involving the guilty often in the very ruin in which they had hoped to entangle others. (2) But the chief aim of the story is to emphasize the duty of maintaining religious habits when tempted to neglect or abandon them, and the certainty with which such fidelity will in the end be rewarded.

If anyone should raise the question, "But did these things really happen?" the answer should be sought along the following lines: (a) It has to be remembered that the book of Daniel was written about the year 165 B.C., *i.e.* about four centuries after the events with which it deals, and is therefore not contemporary history; (b) the difficulties occasioned by the miraculous element in this book—the deliverance of Daniel from the lions and of his friends from the fiery furnace (chap. 3)—recall the similar difficulties that gather round the stories of Elijah and Elisha. We then saw that to the Hebrew historians the idea was more important than the fact, and that their aim was not so much to convey historical information as to create religious impressions and convictions. The book of Daniel, we repeat, was written to sustain the tried and tempted faith of the loyal Jews under the fierce assaults made upon their religion and their sacred books by Antiochus

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Epiphanes ; the writer desired to assure them that fidelity was to be fully rewarded by deliverance from cruelty as personified by the lions and from the flames of persecution. And brilliantly did he succeed in his aim ; for he kindled his comrades to a passionate endurance and enthusiasm which won them victory after victory. That was the writer's intention, and it is with that that we should be concerned. He looked at Daniel praying with his windows open to Jerusalem, and asked his countrymen to be like that, and to trust God for the consequences. There are times when to perform a religious duty silently or stealthily is to play the coward. It is a cheap and flabby religion which is afraid to take the consequences ; and if the men who do face them are not invariably delivered from danger and death, they will assuredly find their place in the end in the everlasting kingdom of God.

## TALES OF JUDGES AND KINGS

### THE SIN OF ACHAN

(Josh. 7)

IN Israel's history, as in our own, success was often followed by failure, and triumph by tragedy ; and it is characteristic of the profoundly religious bent of the Hebrew genius that the tragedy recorded in Josh. 7 is ascribed to sin—indeed the sin is itself the tragedy. This is thrown into the very forefront of the chapter—"the children of Israel played false." The sure way to defeat is to begin by playing false ; to understand what this means historically, we must get behind the meaning of the Hebrew word rather unfortunately rendered in the Authorized Version by "the accursed thing," in the Revised more appropriately by "devoted thing." The corresponding verb in 6<sup>21</sup> is respectively rendered by "they utterly destroyed" (A.V.) and "they devoted" (R.V. margin). To "devote" a thing, in this sense, is, strictly, to withdraw it from common use, to put it under the ban, as we see clearly from the important verses (Lev. 27<sup>28f.</sup>). In practice this means that property thus devoted passes irrevocably from its owner to God—that is, to His sanctuary,



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treasury, or priests; while in the case of persons, such as the inhabitants of Jericho and the Canaanite population generally, they are "devoted" to destruction. The spoil of Jericho had been devoted, reserved for Jehovah, withdrawn from common use; Achan, ignoring its "sacred" character, had appropriated some of it, thus involving himself in the ban and exposing himself to destruction.

But with the second verse we leave the religious aspect of the story, and face the historical facts, which are very simple and natural. Israel's easy victory at Jericho apparently tempted them to underestimate the enemy's power of resistance; and to the next assault—that upon Ai, a place near Jericho on the road leading up to the Judean highlands—a comparatively small number of troops was sent, with the result that Israel sustained a defeat as sharp as it was unexpected. It is characteristic of ancient piety that their leader at once brings the matter before God, whom he addresses with a naïveté which reminds us of some of the prayers of Moses. Jehovah's reputation is at stake, Joshua argues, and this defeat will be a signal to the native populations to rise up and exterminate Israel. But soon comes back the significant answer, "Israel hath sinned." Her defeat is no accident, it is explained by the fact that there is something wrong, or rather someone wrong; one man's sin brought defeat upon the army. The gravity of the sin is powerfully suggested by the four phrases used in verse 11 to describe it; it was de-

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fiance of one of the great laws of the religious community; it was theft, concealment, greed. "That is why the children of Israel cannot stand before their enemies, but turn their backs before them" (verse 12). The whole people is exposed to the doom of extermination which the guilty Achan has brought on, by appropriating the spoil and so sharing its nature as a "devoted" thing, and the people will not be safe until the connection between them and Achan is sundered by the destruction of Achan. That is the process of reasoning through which, in this and similar cases, the mind of the ancient Hebrew more or less consciously went.

So the thing to be immediately done was to discover the culprit, and this was effected, as in the similar story in 1 Sam. 14, by means of the lot. This was held to be an indication of the divine will, on the principle laid down in Prov. 16<sup>33</sup>, "the lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing of it lies wholly with Jehovah." The people are formally assembled, and the gradual process of the lot finally marked out Achan as the guilty man. At Joshua's request, he frankly confessed his sin, and told him where he would find what he had wrongfully appropriated. When the articles were recovered they were laid before Jehovah—that is, deposited in His treasury where they rightfully belonged (6<sup>19</sup>). But confession and restoration could not cancel the defeat and humiliation already inflicted, and by the stern law of the ban the sinner must die. Tradition varies as to the

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way in which he met his end and the extent to which others were involved in his doom. According to one account he was burned (*cf.* verses 15 and 25), according to another he was stoned (two references with different Hebrew words in verse 25. The fifteenth verse seems to show that it is hardly right to interpret the burning of verse 25 as the burning of the corpses, but to regard it rather as an alternative tradition of the mode of death). Again, verse 26, and one clause in verse 25, suggest that the doom fell only upon Achan ; whereas, in accordance with a common practice of the ancient world, according to other clauses of verse 25 (also 24 and 15), his family would seem to be involved in the doom as well. In any case, the last half of verse 25 is most naturally and easily explained as the blending of different traditions.

There is much in this ancient story which seems remote enough from our modern world. The ban and the lot move in a different circle of ideas from ours, and the historical explanation of the disaster at Ai may simply have been that too few men were sent against it. But the story is not without fruitful suggestion for the life of to-day. (1) Defeats are significant. There is always something to learn from them, and they are often explained by sin. According to this chapter it was the sin of Achan's sacrilege and theft ; a modern historian would be inclined to say that it was due to the sin, or at least the folly, of underestimating the force of the enemy, and that is

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only another phase of conceit. Israel's success at Jericho had filled them with pride, and they made inadequate preparation for the next assault. Pride frequently goes before destruction, and is indeed the direct cause of it. So we have to learn, in our fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil, that perpetual vigilance and unremitting preparation are the price of victory. If we go forth to the assault with meagre, or with rusty, weapons, we shall be defeated and humiliated as we deserve to be for our silly pride; for we have to remember that it is only

“he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,  
From strength to strength advancing—only he,  
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.”

(2) We learn further from the story the importance of the individual. One man's sin may involve an army in defeat or an enterprise in ruin. In the huge complex of modern society we are in danger of forgetting the far-reaching consequences of individual action. No man ever sins unto himself alone; his sin always involves consequences for others; sometimes on a wide and tragic scale. By our individual action we may promote or hinder the progress of the world and scatter happiness or ruin far beyond ourselves.

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## THE SONG OF DEBORAH

(Judges 4<sup>4</sup>-5<sup>31</sup>)

Unusual interest attaches to the story of Deborah, whether we regard it from the critical, the literary, the historical, or the religious point of view. It is told twice—once in prose and once in verse; the poetical account (in chap. 5) ranks among the very greatest war-ballads in the world. Quite possibly this poem once belonged to one of the collections referred to elsewhere as the Book of the Wars of Jehovah or the Book of Jashar, and it is probably on poetry of this kind that the prose narratives of the Books of Joshua and Judges ultimately rest. Though the two accounts—in chaps. 4 and 5 respectively—agree in the main and put it beyond doubt that a great Hebrew victory was won in the north against the Canaanites under the inspiration of Deborah, there are interesting and not altogether unimportant divergences, of which the most striking is in the account of how Sisera met his end. In the prose version, Jael, after hospitably entertaining the exhausted captain, takes advantage of the deep sleep into which he had fallen to deal the fatal blow by driving a tent-peg through his temples (4<sup>21</sup>). In the poem she strikes a mighty blow at him as he stands, with his face buried in the bowl of curdled milk, about to drink. We need not here stop to discuss whether, as has been argued, the prose version is due to a slight misunderstanding of the poem, or

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rests upon a different tradition, but the divergence is undeniable. The real audacity of the deed is only understood when we remember how sacred and binding was the law of hospitality which prevailed even in the wild life of the desert ; but the breach of that law would be less grave in the poetical account, where the vigorous blow is struck before the man has had time to taste the milk, and thus to be constituted a guest in the strict sense of the word ; in the prose version, Sisera has already drunk when the treacherous deed is done. The story shows how rough and ready were the conceptions both of religion and morality in those far-off days. There is no thought of pity for a fallen foe, but only wild exultation over his destruction and a passionate prayer that all Jehovah's (*i.e.* Israel's) enemies may similarly perish. But it gives us a fine insight into the fierceness of the struggles by which Israel gradually secured her place in Canaan, and into the power of religion to unite the scattered tribes against a common foe.

The poem (chap. 5) abounds in difficulties and obscurities ; but, as it is older, and therefore historically more valuable than the prose account, being almost if not altogether contemporary with the deliverance which it so brilliantly celebrates, we shall confine our exposition to it. Characteristically it begins with an ascription of praise to Jehovah, the mighty God of battles—praise to which the kings and princes of all the world are invited to listen, so

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splendid has been the victory and so glorious the God who gave it against such fearful odds (1-3). His might is vividly suggested by 4 f., where He comes from His ancient southern home (here we meet with the primitive local conception of God) with giant resounding steps that shake earth and heaven and bring down the clouds in streams of water (4, 5). In the days before those two heroic women, Deborah and Jael, delivered the land from the oppressor, terror reigned, caravans were nowhere to be seen, travellers took to the byways, the soldiers of Israel, being without proper weapons, could not hope to make headway against the well-armed Canaanites (6-8). But a change came. The leaders began to take heart, as the story was rehearsed of the mighty acts done by Jehovah for His people in the days of old. We can imagine, at a gathering of the clans, some one appealing to Deborah, who, as we learn from 4<sup>4</sup>, is already a well-known figure, in the words, "Awake, awake, Deborah, utter a song." Instantly she responds with a challenge to the leader, "Awake, Barak, and take thy captors captive" (9-12). Then would follow a scene of wild enthusiasm, and the call would run throughout the land to rally to the flag. Verses 13-18 represent the national response to this call. Some of the tribes came, some stayed away. Generally speaking, those who were nearest came—the battle was fought on the great plain of Jezreel towards the north—*viz.* Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (*i.e.* Manasseh) to the south of the plain, and

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Zebulun, Issachar, Naphtali to the north. Reuben and Gilead (*i.e.* Gad) across the Jordan refused to come, as did also Dan and Asher in the remoter north. These selfish tribes are stingingly reproached, while the loftiest praise is conferred on those who risked their lives in the national cause.

The battle is not described, but we are given to understand that the very powers above fought against the Canaanite kings. Their influence was seen in the mighty rainstorm which broke and swelled the waters of the Kishon, which flowed through the plain so high that the war chariots were useless and the warriors were swept away (19-22).

Then a curse is called down on the people of Meroz—some town in the neighbourhood of the battlefield—for refusing to help in securing the national victory ; and in contrast, a special blessing is announced for the heroic Jael, who, woman as she was, dealt the decisive blow (23-27). Then comes a touching picture of Sisera's mother, peering with anxious eyes for the son who will never come back again ; and the poem closes, as it began, with a prayer.

Many stirring thoughts and emotions are suggested by this brilliant poem. 1. True patriotism can never be independent of religion. In her own primitive way, Israel felt that it was Jehovah's battles she was fighting, and she is conscious that the victory had been won by His help. When we can believe that in the work or the struggle in which our nation is



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engaged we are really coming "to the help of the Lord," *i.e.* really advancing some of the ends dear to Jesus and vital to the true welfare of man, then patriotism has at once the glow and the sanction of religion.

2. True patriotism demands the highest and the sternest sacrifice. Zebulun and Naphtali risked their lives, and won an imperishable place in this immortal song, while scorn is poured upon the laggard, miscreant, selfish tribes who refused to come. If the national cause be really a worthy cause, and the battle be indeed the Lord's, the true man will not lag behind, like Reuben, in inglorious ease; he will leave his happy home, and travel across the world to risk and, if need be, to yield his life for the sake of the ideals that he cherishes and of the nation that has taught him to cherish them.

3. In the sphere of patriotism the services of women are as necessary and as valuable as those of men. It is the courage and patriotism of two women that this ancient song celebrates. Barak may have led the troops to the field, but it was by the flaming words of Deborah that he and his army were kindled to the fight, and it was Jael who dealt the crushing and decisive blow. The women of to-day need not emulate her methods, but they may well emulate that spirit of heroic daring which will take risks and endure hardships in order to rid their country of the evils that threaten its better life.

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## THE CALL OF GIDEON

(Judges 6)

Like the story of Deborah, the story of Gideon also furnishes interesting problems to the student of criticism, history, and religion. In its present form it seems to rest, as the stories in the Pentateuch do, on at least two sources which are broadly characterized by a difference in the name of deity—Jehovah (“The LORD”) being used in the one source, and Elohim (*i.e.* God) in the other. It is difficult to resist the impression that we have in this chapter two accounts of the call of Gideon. In 6<sup>11-24</sup> we are told of a divine visitant—the angel of Jehovah or Jehovah Himself—who came upon the despondent Gideon, called him, and sent him forth with a very definite promise of victory. Gideon asked for and received a sign to convince him of the supernatural character of his visitor. In verse 34 he has summoned his clansmen, and, clothed with the spirit of Jehovah, is ready for the fray, when, to our astonishment, in verses 36-40 he again asks for a sign, and, not content with receiving this, asks for another, which he also receives. No man in his senses will say that this is psychologically impossible. It might be argued that, at the last moment, his heart failed him, or that he wished to reassure himself yet more completely that the voice that was summoning him was divine. But it is certainly worth noting that whereas in the former passage the

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word for the deity was, with hardly an exception, Jehovah, it is here God. Taken in conjunction with the familiar phenomenon of duplication, which characterizes the Pentateuchal narratives, the most natural explanation is that we have here a later account of a reassuring sign which parallels the account of the sign—presumably from another document—earlier in the chapter. This is not a point to bring before a class, but it has its interest for the intelligent student of the literary structure of the Bible.

In this chapter we see again how Israel was harassed by her neighbours after she had begun to occupy Canaan. The Midianites, nomads from the wilderness to the southeast, used to swarm across the Jordan about harvest time into the very heart of the country, rob the people of their crops, and so terrify them that they hid themselves in caves. As an illustration of the terror to which Israel was reduced, we find Gideon beating out his wheat, not on the threshing-floor which was usually upon some windy height, but furtively in the rocky trough where the grapes were trodden. Despair is in his heart, as he gloomily meditates on his country's fortunes, but he is doing his work well, for suddenly he hears himself addressed as a mighty man of valour. The stranger who thus addresses him turns out to be none other than Jehovah Himself or His angel—the visit of a god in human form is a feature also of other ancient stories—but at first Gideon does not

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suspect this. On receiving a call, however, to smite the Midianites and a promise of divine help Gideon asks for a sign "that it is Thou that talkest with me." He hospitably prepared such food as might be set for a guest, whereupon the stranger touched it with his staff. Instantly there leapt forth the devouring flame, and the stranger vanished. Now Gideon knows that he has been face to face with a divine being, and he is terrified. But a voice reassures him, "Peace (*shalom*) be unto thee," and in gratitude he built an altar to which he gave a name that recalled his experience (6<sup>11-24</sup>). Doubtless the food set forth upon the rock beneath the sacred oak was regarded as the exact prototype of the sacrifice offered in later times upon Gideon's altar.

In the following episode (25-32) which presents many difficulties Gideon comes before us as a man with a passion for religious reform. The Baal worship, which was clearly popular in the district, he detested and attacked at great personal risk, destroying the altar, and cutting down the asherah or wooden pole (wrongly rendered "grove" in the Authorized Version) which stood near the altar and carried with it associations of tree worship. When his father was challenged to put his son to death for his attack on the Baal, he pointedly hinted that a true god should be able to look after himself and need no human defence. The real meaning of the name Jerubbaal, which tradition associated with Gideon on the strength of this incident, is obscure.

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As it stands, it would mean simply "Baal contends" or "let Baal contend." There is some reason, however, to think that the word should have only one *b*, the *Jeru* corresponding to the first part of the word Jerusalem; but we are not in a position to interpret it.

The story finely suggests the sort of man whom God needs to do the world's or his nation's work. (1) He must be deeply concerned about the fortunes of the nation to which he belongs—not absorbing his energies in the pursuit of money or pleasure or sport or self, but vexed at the misfortunes of his people (6<sup>13</sup>), and at their failure to achieve their proper destiny. Such a man may cherish doubt; and, in his despondent moods, may be tempted to believe that the age of miracles is past. But such doubts are not fatal if high aspirations are present and the energy to prosecute with zeal the task that comes to hand. For (2) this too is indispensable to the man who is to be greatly used by God, and who is to render any valuable service to his fellows. Gideon is cramped, through the national adversity, in the narrow space of the winepress; but there he shows himself a mighty man of valour. As Principal G. A. Smith has finely said, "It is the picture of a man, manfully doing the one duty left to him, under extreme disadvantage, and while his heart is gnawed by doubt. Yet it was here, in this close atmosphere amid the dust, that the cramped man was found of God. Here is a great lesson for us, that

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God appears to a man who makes the most of what he has."

### GIDEON'S THREE HUNDRED

(Judges 7)

Critical difficulties beset this part also of the story of Gideon ; let us touch lightly on one—the description of the tactics by which his famous victory was won. His warriors are represented as all having trumpets in their right hands, and pitchers in their left, with torches inside the pitchers. One would suppose that the manipulation of a pitcher with a lighted torch inside would, without the trumpets, be enough to keep both hands busy. The redundancy of the description suggests that elements have been incorporated from more sources than one. (Compare the phenomena which led to a similar conclusion in chap. 6.) It is impossible to disentangle these sources with certainty, but it seems probable that the trumpets belong to the one source, and the pitchers and torches to the other. In the one version the Midianites are thrown into headlong confusion and panic by the loud and sudden trumpet-blasts at dead of night ; in the other by the sudden crashing of the pitchers and flashing of the torches. Or Gressman may be right in thinking that, in the original form of the story, Gideon alone gave the blast on the trumpet, on which preconcerted sign his men smashed their pitchers and brandished their

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flaring torches. But unless on the assumption that the story combines different elements of tradition, it is difficult to form any intelligible picture of men holding a torch in the left hand and a sword and a trumpet in the right. We cannot, however, too often assure ourselves that this assumption of different documentary sources, far from discrediting, actually enhances the central features of the narrative ; for it simply means that we have two witnesses instead of one to the broad fact that Gideon's victory over the mighty hosts of Midian was won by a handful of men.

This victory made a stupendous impression on Israel, it is remembered and referred to four centuries later (Isa. 9<sup>4</sup>) ; and it is worth while to watch how it was won. It was won not by numbers, but by a few brave men, and by skilful tactics. The battlefield is no place for cowards, so first they are given the opportunity to leave ; and the proportion of cowards turns out to be two in three. Would it be any higher on the moral battlefields of to-day ? When confronted with the temptation to be false to the best that we know, perhaps there would still be twice as many of us to play the coward as to play the man.

But the number of brave men left has still to be reduced ; for the Bible is never weary of reminding us that God can achieve His purposes by means that are slender and unpromising. There have been times in human history when, by the blessing of God,

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under skilful leadership, a few hundred resolute men have saved civilization from an overwhelming force which menaced it. The principle is not quite clear that governed the method by which the ten thousand were reduced to three hundred. Those who bowed on their knees to drink the water were rejected; those who lapped it with their tongue like a dog (verse 5) were accepted. Principal Smith remarks that the former "did not appreciate their position or the foe," while the latter, "who merely crouched, lapping up the water with one hand, while they held their weapons with the other and kept their face to the enemy, were aware of their danger, and had their hearts ready against all surprise. The test, in fact, was a test of attitude, which, after all, both in physical and moral warfare, has proved of greater value than strength or skill—attitude towards the foe and appreciation of his presence." The lapping, however, in verse 5, is distinctly said to have been "with the tongue, as a dog lappeth"; and the putting of the hand to the mouth was probably the action of those who knelt. Verse 6, which, in any case, is not strictly consistent with verse 5, reads somewhat differently and more naturally in certain versions of the Greek text. The reason for the choice of those who lapped would possibly lie, as Gressman has suggested, in their eager and almost animal passion, which would specially qualify them for the work of the warrior.

The tactical move, which took place at the dead of



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the night and which we have already discussed, succeeded in its object of creating a panic among the enemy who, in their bewilderment, turned their swords on one another. The whole passage suggests that the conditions of moral, as of military victory, are courage, caution, vigilance, and resolute attack. On the moral battlefields of life the "day of Midian" may still be repeated by the brave and vigilant man who takes God with him into the fight.

### THE CALL OF SAMUEL

(1 Sam. 3)

Samuel is the link between the period of the Judges and that of the monarchy. He was at once the last of the Judges and the prophet to whom Saul, the first king of Israel, owed his elevation to the throne. His life is therefore of first-rate importance. The first few chapters of 1 Samuel give an extraordinarily graphic picture of the life of the time both in its public and its private aspects—the deep love of Elkanah for his childless wife, the bitterness and strife which bigamy, tolerated by usage, could bring into an ancient home, the joy of a mother over the birth of the child so passionately desired, her resolve—to which Scotland used to furnish an analogy in almost every other family—to dedicate him to the service of the Lord, the happy throng gathered to celebrate the sacred harvest festival, the silent prayer of the patient and sorrowful

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woman, the watchful interest of the supervising priest, and so on : what a vivid transcript of that ancient life !

But we are meantime more particularly concerned with Samuel. He has grown and he is old enough to act as assistant to the aged Eli who needs such help for the offices of the sanctuary, as his sight is beginning to leave him. We are given to understand that there was little religious vitality in the land in those days, or intimate experience of God ; visions were infrequent. It was a time therefore which sorely needed a prophet, a clear true voice to interpret the ways of God, and this chapter shows us a prophet in the making.

It is significant that he was associated in those early days with the priest and sanctuary. Later it was different ; prophet and priest go different ways and have little in common, till many centuries after, when the monarchy was over, the two figures begin to merge again. But in those far-off times reflected in this chapter worship was very simple. How unlike the later elaborated temple, with its highly articulated worship and its hosts of temple servants, is this simple sanctuary—though it too is called temple—where the young minister is actually allowed, and apparently expected, to sleep in the room which contains the ark—that sacred chest with which Jehovah was in some mysterious way associated, and which, as guaranteeing His presence, was borne into battle (4<sup>3</sup>). The Old Testament frequently repre-

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sents divine communications as coming to men during the night-time, sometimes in dreams, and often on sacred ground; it is not surprising therefore that the voice seems to sound in Samuel's ears in the dead of night, when the light is burning low in the sacred room. It is not a dream, for the child runs off to the blind old man, thinking the voice to be his, and that he is calling him because he needs him. But, in fact, he had not called the child at all, so he sent him back to rest. This scene was enacted again and yet again, and not till then did the old man perceive that the call was a higher one; so he instructs the child next time to say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening." Then follows the terrible message of the impending ruin of Eli's house, because he had been a too indulgent father, and had allowed his sons to run riot, in the way described in chap. 2, without restraining them. "His sons," we should read in verse 13—not "made themselves vile," as A.V., nor "did bring a curse upon themselves," as R.V., but "cursed God," as the Greek version has it. Samuel had the sorrowful duty of declaring this message to the aged priest, who submissively received it as from God. Thus was Samuel accredited as a prophet; this verse is in a sense the key to the chapter, which describes the prophet's call (v. 20). "He let none of His words fall <sup>the ground.</sup>"

The ancient Hebrew believed—and it is a very sound belief—that men who did a mighty work for their nation were divinely "called" to it. We saw

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that a call came to soldiers like Gideon: still more may we expect it to come to men chosen to do a specifically religious work like the prophets, *e.g.* Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, as here Samuel. This interesting chapter shows us what the writer regarded as involved in such a call; and, though here the call is to be a prophet, the story is full of suggestion with regard to calls to any other worthy form of life work—especially with regard to the time, the medium, the preparation, and the consequences of the call. (1) The time. Samuel was called young; we know too that Isaiah and Jeremiah were young when they were called. Whatever our “calling” in life is to be, if it is honourable, it will be in some real sense a service of God and of our fellows. All work worth doing may be fairly so regarded; and if so regarded, it is at once consecrated and illumined. We are not all called to be prophets, but we are all called to devote our lives to the high service of God, and—here is the point—we should listen for the call, and let ourselves be called, when we are young. The sooner we yield ourselves to His service, the longer, the happier, and the more effective will that service be. (2) The medium. The call to us may come direct to our soul in the quiet of the night, after prayer or meditation; but it may also come through some human voice—the dear voice of parent or teacher or pastor or friend. The voice that fell upon the ear of Samuel had such a human ring about it that he mistook it for Eli’s. Our ears should be

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sensitive to the voices of those who are over us and wiser than we, for through them not seldom does God speak to our souls. (3) The preparation. The call to high life-service comes not to the careless or the indolent but to the earnest and conscientious, who put mind and heart into what they do and are alert for every opportunity. Samuel was a faithful servant of the sanctuary; at the first sound and at every sound of the voice which he took to be Eli's, he leapt from his couch, awake and ready. Those are the boys whom God can use for the greater service of the future days. (4) The consequences. It is not to soft and easy work that God calls men. Samuel's very first task was a stern one, from which he might well have shrunk. In the world difficult words have to be spoken, dangerous work has to be done, and brave men are needed who will face the hardest things without counting the cost. God honours us by calling us to tasks like these.

### SAUL ANOINTED KING

(I Sam. 8-10)

Hebrew history may be conveniently divided into three periods: (1) from Moses to the establishment of the monarchy—roughly 1200-1000 B.C.; (2) from the monarchy (1000 B.C.) to the exile (586-538 B.C.); (3) after the exile. The monarchy and the exile profoundly affected Hebrew life and thought and they changed the national temper and outlook;

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it is therefore with peculiar interest that we turn to the story of the first king, and of the motives and circumstances that created the monarchy.

Here we have the same phenomenon as we have repeatedly met in our studies all the way from Genesis to Judges: the story of the rise of the monarchy is told in two sources, which happen to be more than usually easy to distinguish from one another. The older story is contained in 9<sup>1</sup>-10<sup>16</sup> and chap. 11; the later in chaps. 8 and 10<sup>17-27</sup>. The main differences between the stories are so obvious that they strike even a totally uncritical reader; but, before passing on to consider them, it is well to remind ourselves that no interest of the faith is imperilled by literary facts of this kind, while there is a distinct historical advantage in being able to trace the different views that were held of the institution of monarchy at different times.

✓ A brief résumé of both stories will make our point clear, and we shall begin with the narrative which lies closest to the events it describes (9<sup>1</sup>-10<sup>16</sup>). According to this, a young man named Saul, of mighty stature, searching for stray asses, happened to reach a spot where a festival was about to be conducted by Samuel the prophet or "seer," who was led to recognize in Saul the king to be. For, in pity for His people, galled by the Philistine yoke, Jehovah had sent in him a captain to save them. Thereafter Saul was anointed king (chap. 9). To reassure and confirm him, Samuel gave him three

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signs, all full of meaning, but most of all the third. According to this, he was to join a band of ecstatic prophets, and, touched by their enthusiasm, he was to seize his opportunity to control and guide it into a movement for the deliverance of his people. The interview with Samuel made another man of Saul. To the surprise of all, he joined the prophetic band, and was touched by their spirit. But on his return he said not a word to his uncle about the kingdom (10<sup>1-16</sup>). Then follows in chap. 11 the account of Saul's defeat of the Ammonites which definitely secured his place upon the throne.

The later account is as follows: provoked by the corruption of Samuel's sons, the elders asked him to appoint them a king. With a sore heart Samuel took their request to God in prayer. For Jehovah was King of Israel; to ask for another was to reject Jehovah Himself; and the choice of a human king would cost them many a sorrow. It would mean the loss of liberty and land, and heavy taxation to maintain the court. But the people, heedless of Samuel's expostulation, clamoured for a king (chap. 8). Samuel, reminding them publicly in Mizpah that their demand was at once an ingratitude and an apostasy, proceeded to his fateful task. By the sacred lot the king to be was discovered and his presence was hailed with shouts of royal welcome (10<sup>17-27</sup>).

These two narratives agree in the main point, that Samuel launched the first Hebrew king upon his

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royal career, but they differ widely in their conceptions of the monarchy. The former regards the kingdom as a blessing and a gift of Jehovah; the king is to "save My people out of the hand of the Philistines." The latter regards the popular request for a king as an implicit rejection of Jehovah (87) and the monarchy as destined to prove a vexation, if not a curse (81<sup>11</sup>). This view coincides with that held in later times, *e.g.* by the prophet Hosea, who, living in times of confusion, which the kings of his day only yet further confounded, repeatedly dwells on the impotence and futility of the institution of monarchy (*cf.* Hos. 13<sup>10</sup>). Most scholars regard the passage in Sam. 8 as a later criticism of the monarchy by someone who, like Hosea, had experienced its evils; but it is by no means impossible that some of these evils—the encroachment upon property, the loss of liberty and equality which came in with the officialdom created by a court—were anticipated by the more far-sighted contemporaries. But what is clear and certain is that the monarchy was both a blessing and a peril.

The passage abounds in scenes which carry us right into the heart of ancient Hebrew life. One of the most important is the description of the early prophets in 10<sup>5</sup>, where we see that they were men inspired by a patriotic and religious ecstasy which was stimulated by music—roughly resembling the Salvation Army rather than the literary prophets of later times like Isaiah.



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The chief interest of the passage, however, gathers round the king and the kingdom, and the melancholy end of Saul must not blind us to his many genuinely kingly qualities. He is modest, he is simple and unassuming, he is on friendly terms with his servant, he is tenderly considerate of the feelings of his father (9<sup>5</sup>), he is quick to identify himself with the patriotic movement, and, as we see in chap. 11, quick to strike a blow for it.

Israel was not safe unless she could present to her Philistine and other enemies a united front, and the monarchy was thus a political necessity, securing for the people this unity, concentration, and solidarity. But as we have seen, it brought grave perils. The situation was singularly like that created for Germany by the war of 1870 which, on the one hand, welded the separate states into a unity, and, on the other, developed in time an officialism which is alien to the spirit of true democracy. As Vice-Chancellor Sadler has said: The Prussian tradition "has stiffened Germany. Its policy has given Germany forty years of union, a conscious pride in national unity, a great place among the Powers of the world." Precisely this might have been said of the early Hebrew monarchy. But again, "the leaders of Prussia dread the growth of Social Democracy. They realize the increasing influence of English ideas of freedom" (*Modern Germany and the Modern World*). This is the modern counterpart of 1 Sam. 8<sup>10-18</sup>.

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### THE "REJECTION" OF SAUL

(1 Sam. 15)

This chapter deals with a crucial incident in the career of Saul, and goes to illustrate the truth pressed home upon the people by Samuel (according to chap. 8)—the folly of clamouring for a king. The Amalekites, a Bedouin tribe to the south of Judah, had hampered and harassed Israel from the days when they had first tried to penetrate into Palestine (Ex. 17<sup>81</sup>.; Deut. 25<sup>171</sup>.), and were still making raids upon the land as late as the time of Saul—indeed, these continued till their power was broken by David (1 Sam. 30). Samuel therefore, in the name of Jehovah the national God of Israel, ordered Saul to devote the whole people to destruction. The word used is the same as that used of the destruction of Jericho in Josh. 6<sup>21</sup>, and what that involved is described in Lev. 27<sup>281</sup>. Property thus "devoted" passed irrevocably to God—that is, to His sanctuary, treasury, or priests, while persons or animals were put to death. Saul, however, disobeyed Samuel's injunction, sparing the Amalekite king and the best of the cattle; and, when challenged by Samuel, he defended himself by maintaining that the cattle had been reserved for sacrifice—of Agag at first he says nothing. Then Samuel solemnly pronounced upon the disobedient Saul the terrible doom of rejection by the God whose word he had rejected. Fervently did Saul confess his sin and

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entreat pardon, but Samuel again pronounced the same stern words of doom, and turned to go. In despair Saul caught hold of his skirt and it rent. Samuel seized upon this as a divinely-sent omen. "Even so," he said, "hath the immutable God of Israel rent thy kingdom, and given it to thy neighbour, who is better than thou"—the allusion is to David. But he left him the semblance of kingly power. Then, sword in hand, Samuel himself, at the sanctuary—that is the meaning of the phrase "before Jehovah" in verse 33—executed upon the surviving king of Israel's foes the cruel judgment which his own cruelty deserved. According to the Greek version, Agag came before Samuel trembling, and saying, "Surely death is bitter." Thus the ban or "destruction" was formally completed, and Saul and Samuel parted.

This story, like others in the book of Samuel (*cf.* chap. 14), brings us face to face with the primitive religion of Israel. It is told to account for the so-called "rejection" of Saul. But another version of the rejection is given in 13<sup>7-15</sup>. According to this, Saul after waiting at a critical stage of a campaign for the seven days appointed by Samuel, finally offered sacrifice himself, and the ground of his rejection is here found in his not "keeping the commandment of Jehovah"—a ground which is not very intelligible, as he had kept the only commandment given, or at least recorded, in verse 8. The crime can hardly have lain in the sacrifice being

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ffered by Saul himself ; for in those days there was nothing illegal in such conduct on the part of a tyman, and, had that been the author's conception, e would doubtless have made it plain. The truth , that here, as we have so often seen elsewhere, two xplanations are offered of a fact. The undoubted act is that there was a breach between Saul and amuel, and in this breach lies the tragedy of Saul's areer.

In this dramatic meeting Saul and Samuel face each other as the representatives of opposite policies and ideals. Saul doubtless had a motive in sparing Agag ; and, though we are left to conjecture what it was, it may well have been political. The Amalekites, though humbled, were still active, as we have seen, in the time of David ; and Saul may have imagined that by his clemency, he was paving the way for an ultimate reconciliation. The indiscriminate slaughter of the cattle may also have seemed to him a useless and senseless act. On these grounds it has been maintained by some scholars that Samuel, in his demands, was the champion of a barbarous religious conservatism, while Saul represented a more humane and progressive ideal. It is at any rate certain that Saul dated his downfall from the day of his breach with Samuel ; and in the wonderful scene with the witch of Endor on the eve of the last fateful battle (chap. 28) it is the shade of the departed Samuel that he longs, in his despair, to consult. The pathos of Saul's career lies

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in the fact that the task of consolidating his kingdom, beset as it was by enemies on every hand, was too great for him to accomplish. He came to it with a mind predisposed, it would seem, to melancholy and aggravated by jealousy of his brilliant and versatile rival, David. But it was a sorrowful day for him when, from whatever motive, he parted from the prophet, who had called him from obscurity to the foremost place in the land. There are friends from whom when we wilfully part, we go steadily down, haunted by the awful conviction that we are rejected, as it were, by God himself.

### DAVID AND GOLIATH

(1 Sam. 17)

The exquisite story of David and Goliath is so familiar that we shall do nothing more than briefly call attention (1) to some of the critical problems involved, (2) to some points usually overlooked, (3) to the lessons of the story.

I. The difficulties are chiefly three : (a) In 2 Sam. 21<sup>19</sup> it is not David but Elhanan, one of his mighty men, who is credited with the victory over Goliath. (b) The picture of David here given, as a ruddy shepherd boy, agreeing as it does with the previous chapter which describes his anointing (16<sup>1-13</sup>), is hard to reconcile with the other description of him as " a mighty man of valour and a man of war " (16<sup>18</sup>). (c) Again, verses 55-58 represent David as being

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introduced to Saul, who seems to know nothing of him, as if for the first time, whereas, according to 16<sup>21</sup>, David is already at the court, not only well known to, but dearly beloved by, Saul. We must once again, as so often before, assume that we have here different literary sources, and that the story of David's combat with Goliath is late. Indeed many of the verses where the difficulties are most keenly felt are not found in the Greek version of the story. But about David's prowess in war there can be no manner of doubt; that is attested by the jubilant shouts with which the women acclaim him—"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." It is the business of the critic and the historian to ascertain the facts; it is the business of the teacher and preacher to discover the great religious ideas by which the story is inspired. To do this is the only way to enter fully into the purpose of the writer.

II. The story is brilliantly told, and the heart beats high as we watch the unequal contest and wonder what will happen to the Hebrew boy as he goes out unarmed to face the Philistine giant—symbol of the fight of goodness with the mighty godless forces of the world. Every detail counts. The giant is about ten feet high. David, though not so tall as Eliab (16<sup>7</sup>), must yet have been regarded by the narrator as of a goodly height, since he can put on the armour of Saul, whose stature is more than average (10<sup>23</sup>). The scene in which he tried on the

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armour would be very amusing to an ancient audience, as it still is to us if we exercise our imaginations. It is worth marking that when David comes out, Goliath notices only his staff, but not the sling from which he was to receive his own death-blow. No wonder he disdained and cursed the boy. The charm of David is felt through all the brilliant story ; it comes out in his physical beauty, in his fine manners and gracious speech, in his love for the sheep, and in the skill and power with which he defended them. This leads us to the main lessons of the story.

III. There are subsidiary touches, important in their own way, as, *e.g.*, that Goliath was slain by his own sword. But, keeping our eye steadily on David, we learn something of the conditions of victory in the battle of life. Notice (1) that David has a passion for religion—a deep faith in, and love for, his God. It is the insult to his God that stung him into hurling his defiant challenge at Goliath (verse 26) ; and he fearlessly goes out to the fight because he quietly trusts this God—“He will deliver me” (verse 37). The secret of his trust is revealed in the suggestive name, which is not very common in the Old Testament—the “living” God. A God who is alive is a God who can do something, who can help and strengthen His servants when they champion His cause—together a God worth believing in. (2) Notice David’s fine control of his tongue and temper (verse 29). Often envy and misunderstand-

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ing, even from quarters where they might least be expected, dog the heels of those who are taking risks and making sacrifices for country, church, or God. Here David is flouted by his own brother. But, both in conversation and controversy, the prudent man knows how to give the soft answer that turneth away wrath. This is one of the paths to victory. (3) To succeed, a man must be himself. He must not masquerade in another man's armour, ape his manner, echo his voice. He must fight in the armour and with the weapons with which he is familiar; otherwise he will move about clumsily and ill at ease. He may even stumble and fall by the very weight of his unfamiliar armour before he is thrown prostrate by his adversary. Insincerity, the putting on of what is not our own, is the road to ridicule and ruin. (4) Notice that David had a rich experience of battle behind him. The Hebrew words imply that he had many a time faced lions and bears (34, 35). It is no wild haphazard shot that he hurls at the giant—otherwise the stone would not have reached the spot with such deadly accuracy—it is the shot of one who had years of practice behind him. God needs men who trust Him, but He can do most with them when they are trained. There is the obligation to train our powers, that we may the better face the crisis when it comes. (5) Notice the prudence and care with which David prepares for the fight. He does not take any stones he carefully selects the ones he wants; and, not



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rashly anticipating that the giant will fall a victim to his first stone, he prudently takes with him five. Even the man who trusts his God is in honour bound to prepare himself, so far as human foresight may, for all eventualities.

He who goes forth to his battle in this spirit will find that, though his weapons may seem slender, if not ridiculous, in the eyes of an unbelieving world, God will always give him grace and endurance, and often, too, the victory.

### SOLOMON ANOINTED KING

(1 Kings 1<sup>1</sup>-2<sup>12</sup>)

This lesson may not be edifying, but it is certainly informing. It tells how David's son and successor, Solomon, reached and secured the throne. We are to picture David as old and weak, not only in body but perhaps also in mind. Absalom being dead, Adonijah was the heir apparent (2 Sam. 3<sup>4</sup>). Supported by Joab, David's general, and Abiathar, one of his priests, he seized his opportunity at a sacred feast to lay his plans for the succession. This gave Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba the mother of Solomon just the opening they wanted to scheme for Solomon. It is somewhat disappointing to find Nathan, who had once been to David as the very voice of God (2 Sam. 12), stooping here to play the rôle of the intriguing politician, but his special interest in Solomon is explained by the fact that the

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latter had grown up under his influence (2 Sam. 12<sup>25</sup>) In the course of a cleverly contrived interview with David, Nathan and Bathsheba insinuated that Adonijah could not have gone so far without David's own consent, and that this consent was a violation of his solemn promise to Bathsheba that Solomon would be his successor. There is no record of such a promise, and it is very improbable that it had ever been given; the two plotters appear to be simply taking advantage of the weakness of the old king's memory, and of the consequent unlikelihood of his contradicting them. The plot succeeded. Indignant at Adonijah's seeming intrigue, David, with a solemn oath, took immediate steps to have Solomon proclaimed king amid the acclamations of the people, to the great satisfaction of Zadok and Benaiah, the rivals of Abiathar and Joab, and of the foreign body-guard. The sounds of jubilation startled Adonijah and his guests; still more, the news that Solomon was king, and the company dispersed. Adonijah fled for his life to the protection of the altar. Solomon released him with an ambiguous promise and banished him from the court. Thus Solomon owed his elevation to the throne to a palace intrigue (chap. 1).

Then follows David's dying charge to the son who was to succeed him. After enjoining upon him—in language which unmistakably betrays the hand of the later historian—the duty of keeping the commandments of Jehovah as written in the law of

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Moses (for on that his throne depended), he then instructs him to take vengeance on Joab for the blood of Abner and Amasa, to show kindness to Barzillai who had come to his aid in the dark days of Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 17<sup>27-29</sup>), and to take vengeance on Shimei, who in those same days had cursed him (2 Sam. 16<sup>5-8</sup>; 19<sup>18-23</sup>). The rest of the chapter (2<sup>13ff.</sup>) shows quite frankly how, on one pretext or another, Solomon got rid of his rival Adonijah, and of others who were believed to be unfriendly, hostile, or dangerous. First, Adonijah was put to death. Doubtless his request for the hand of Abishag was unwise, as, according to the Oriental usages of the day, Solomon could plausibly enough regard this as a bid for the throne (2 Sam. 16<sup>21</sup>), though Adonijah's motive was quite innocent. But it furnished Solomon with a good excuse for putting him out of the way. Then came the turn of Adonijah's chief supporters; first the priest Abiathar was deposed, then Joab was ruthlessly slain, and the two were replaced by their rivals Zadok and Benaiah. Solomon also took advantage of a broken vow of Shimei to put him to death. All the obstacles being thus removed, "the kingdom"—we are candidly informed—"was established in the hand of Solomon."

It was a truly Oriental, but certainly not a creditable, way of establishing a kingdom. It is the literal truth that Solomon, as Gressman says, "erected his throne on the dead bodies of his opponents." The

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only question for the historian is whether he did this on his own initiative, or at the instigation of David in accordance with his dying charge. Many Old Testament scholars, starting from the undoubted fact that some of the language in this charge is late, regard the whole section (2<sup>1-12</sup>) as unhistorical, and designed to relieve Solomon, the builder of the temple, of the odium of these murders. But, considering the reverence of later ages for David, this would have been a dear price to pay for the reputation of Solomon. The truth probably is that the guilt of the murder of Joab and Shimei must be shared between David and Solomon—by David for commanding it, and by Solomon for executing it, while for the murder of Adonijah Solomon must bear the entire responsibility.

It is sad to see so ignoble an end to the reign of the great and magnanimous David, and the foundations of the new throne bathed in blood. The first three kings of Israel, Saul, David, Solomon, represent a swift and steady decline away from the simplicities of early Hebrew life, in the direction of the worldliness, extravagances, and cruelties of Oriental courts. Saul, *e.g.*, is recorded to have had only one wife (1 Sam. 14<sup>50</sup>) and one concubine (2 Sam. 21<sup>11</sup>). Of David six wives are mentioned (2 Sam. 3<sup>2-5</sup>), while Solomon's harem is said to have included seven hundred wives and three hundred concubine (1 Kings 11<sup>3</sup>). Again, David's methods were more violent than Saul's; Solomon's, as we have seen, more

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violent than David's. Noting these things, we begin to sympathize with the fear expressed in 1 Sam. 8 of the dangers of monarchy. Solomon is the full-blooded Oriental despot, the incarnation—as his subsequent career shows—of that very secular spirit, against which the nobler voices of Israel uttered an earnest and continual protest ; and one element of interest in his subsequent story lies in watching what became of the kingdom established by such methods and by such a man. The lesson of modern no less than of ancient history is that an empire established or maintained by violence is anything but stable.

### SOLOMON'S CHOICE OF WISDOM

(1 Kings 3<sup>4-15</sup>)

Here Solomon comes before us as the embodiment of wisdom ; and the tradition that the bulk of the Book of Proverbs owes its origin to him must rest upon a conception of him as pre-eminently the wise man of Israel. This chapter well illustrates the importance and the nature of the quality which the Hebrews designated by wisdom.

At the sanctuary of Gibeon, about six miles northwest of Jerusalem, Solomon appears to have celebrated his accession by a great religious ceremony ; and there, on the following night, he was visited in a dream by Jehovah, who offered to grant him whatever he would ask. Then, just on the threshold

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of his royal duties, the young king humbly besought his God—not indeed for riches or long life or victory, but—for wisdom and insight touching all matters which it fell to him to judge, or, more generally, for the power to govern his people with discretion. Jehovah heard and answered his wise prayer, and gave him, besides riches and honour, length of days for which he had not asked.

Simple as the story is, it is not without its difficulties. First of all, what does it mean by “wisdom”? Apparently the wise direction of the high affairs of state; as in the verse in Proverbs (8<sup>15</sup>), “By me kings reign and princes decree justice.” But the oppressive measures of Solomon (*cf.* 12<sup>2</sup>, “Thy father made our yoke heavy,” in allusion to such incidents as 5<sup>13-16</sup>), which ultimately led to a revolution, would hardly at least be in accordance with modern ideas of political wisdom. Again, the innocence which seems to lie behind the simple confession, “I know not how to go out or come in,” is not easy to reconcile with the violent and unscrupulous measures by which, as we saw in chap. 2 Solomon secured his place upon the throne. The story undoubtedly received its present form in late times, when by “wisdom,” in this context, may be broadly meant the spirit which prompted Solomon to aspire to be a peaceful king, a promoter of culture as we should say, rather than a warrior king like David. There would thus shine from the passage a genuine appreciation of peace in contrast with

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war, as the true and normal basis of a nation's real welfare—an attitude which most civilized nations share to-day.

Very probably, however, in the present setting of the narrative, wisdom is used in a more limited sense ; for it is immediately followed by the story of the judgment of Solomon in the difficult case of the two women who each claimed to be the mother of the living child (3<sup>16-28</sup>), a story which appears to be intended as an illustration of the wisdom with which Solomon is now divinely endowed. In that case it is judicial wisdom, literally the power to “judge” the people (verse 9) who come to him with obscure or conflicting claims ; or, more broadly, as Skinner puts it, “that blending of insight, shrewdness, and tact which penetrates the disguises of human action, and plays deftly on the true motives which lie beneath.” For the quality as thus conceived perhaps the most appropriate single word would be shrewdness. It is exemplified again in the riddles with which the queen of Sheba tested Solomon (10<sup>1</sup>).

In spite, however, of its difficulties the story is full of suggestion and profit. It answers the question : What is the thing best worth having in life ? 1. Men answer that question in many ways—wealth, honour, long life ; and these are far from being unworthy aspirations, for these things are gifts of God—actually conferred by Him upon Solomon, according to the sequel. 2. But there is something better still,

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*viz.* the power to fill our place and do our duty in whatever sphere we are. Solomon was ruler, and his ambition was to rule well; all of us are workers and our ambition should be to work well. For this we need tact, discretion, insight, "wisdom," the power to penetrate beneath appearances, to concentrate upon essential things; we need in short "an understanding heart." 3. It is worth noting that this, like the other things, is here regarded, not as a human acquisition, but as a divine gift; it comes to him whose heart is in tune with the Eternal, and it is not without significance that the man to whom it here comes is represented as waiting upon God in His sanctuary, and offering to Him a most costly sacrifice. It is in the fear of the Lord, we are often told, that true wisdom lies. 4. It is the simple truth also that this deeply-rooted wisdom carries with it the promise of long life, vigour, riches, honour. The man who is thus "wise" in relation to God and to his fellows is more likely to win these things than the fool. This truth of the narrative, which, in no external or arbitrary way, associates them with the possession of wisdom, is poetically expressed in Prov. 3<sup>13ff.</sup>

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,  
And the man that getteth understanding.  
Length of days is in her right hand;  
In her left hand are riches and honour."

The narrative further suggests the need of prayer



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- • and of divine guidance in face of life's responsibilities. Note incidentally the curious fact that the life of one's enemies (verse 11) is regarded as a possible object of petition—a fact which sheds a lurid light upon the early temper of Israel, and shows how far she had yet to travel on the way of love.

### THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT TO SOLOMON

(1 Kings 10<sup>1-13</sup>)

Solomon was a great monarch; but, in spite of his founding of the temple, he was great, as becomes more plain with every fresh page of his story, as a secular and not as a religious force. This is well illustrated by the romantic story of the visit of the queen of Sheba, a great commercial empire in south-western Arabia. The three closing verses of the preceding chapter describe Solomon's far-reaching commercial enterprise made possible by his navy, which the skilful Phœnicians had helped him to build and man. With it he traded down the whole length of the Red Sea, and even as far as Ophir (apparently on the Persian Gulf), whence he brought back gold, costly wood, and precious stones (10<sup>11f.</sup>).

It is thought by many scholars that these facts help to explain the queen's visit. As the ruler of a great commercial empire, it was important for her to be on good terms with the brilliant and enterprising king of Israel, whose ships skirted her shores on their way to yet more distant places. This

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motive is still more or less obscurely suggested by the allusion in verses 4 and 5 to the things which impressed her. It was not only Solomon's wisdom that took her breath away, but his palace, his luxurious table, his magnificent retinue, etc.; the enumeration of these things is much more elaborate than the reference to his wisdom, and verse 7 explicitly says that it was his prosperity no less than his wisdom that stimulated her curiosity. But, with the delightful naïveté characteristic of such stories, the motive actually assigned for her visit to Solomon is that she might "test him with riddles." The "wisdom" which his answers displayed would be wisdom of the type presupposed in the story of the two mothers who each claimed the living child (*cf.* 3<sup>16-28</sup>). Solomon was able to answer all her questions—so the story runs; and so wonderful did he seem to her, for wisdom and wealth, that even his servants were to be envied the privilege of being so near him; and she broke into praise of the God of Israel for giving His people such a king.

It would be easy to deduce from the story some such trite half truth as that those whom God conspicuously endows command the respect and admiration of all, both near and far. But perhaps it is more to the point to note that chap. 10 with the story of his far-famed wisdom and splendour is ominously enough, followed by chap. 11 with the story of his large harem with its concomitant evil passions, his idolatry, and the revolution which split

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the kingdom for ever in two. The passion for wealth, which seems so innocent and romantic in chap. 10, expressed itself in ambitions which, by putting an intolerably heavy strain upon the property and the liberty of his subjects (4<sup>7</sup>, 2<sup>7</sup>, 5<sup>13</sup>), bred a discontent which issued in revolution; and that wisdom which consisted only of the power to interpret riddles, and had no large grasp of those religious and moral qualities on which the security of men and states depends, could not ward off the inevitable ruin. The story of our chapter, taken with its sequel, really suggests the futility of a splendour and a wisdom that are merely earthly. They neither keep the heart true nor the State safe. What does it profit a man if he gain the world and lose his soul?

### THE KINGDOM TORN ASUNDER

(1 Kings 12<sup>1-20</sup>)

The united kingdom (of Israel and Judah) built by the genius of David and maintained by the enterprise of Solomon was torn asunder in the reign and by the folly of Rehoboam, his son and successor (937-920 B.C.). A deeper cause, however, as was hinted in the last lesson, lay in the extravagant ambitions of Solomon himself, which secured for his kingdom a transient splendour at the cost of the goodwill of his subjects. The story is not fully told; it is suggested by occasional hints in the narrative of his reign. For the elaborate building

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enterprises of Solomon (*e.g.* his palace, the temple etc.) huge armies of labourers were necessary, and these he drew very largely from his own people (5<sup>13-18</sup>). This invasion of the liberty of his subjects and this utilization of their labour are what is referred to in the complaint made by them on the accession of Rehoboam (12<sup>4</sup>), "Thy father made our yoke grievous." Such treatment would kindle thoughts of revolution in the hearts of free men, and we begin to realize how true is the criticism of the monarchy in 1 Sam. 8 as an institution calculated to imperil the liberty and the property of the people. To this political reason for the revolt is added another from the side of religion. Solomon's alliances by marriage (largely perhaps for commercial reasons) with foreign nations inevitably involved the recognition of foreign gods (11<sup>1-8</sup>); thus the capital itself became tainted with idolatry. This is the reason on which the prophet Ahijah dwells (11<sup>33</sup>) when he appears before Jeroboam to instigate him to revolt.

Jeroboam, to whom Ahijah appeals, is the natural leader of the revolt, and he had especial opportunity to foment disaffection by reason of the post to which Solomon had assigned him as superintendent of a large body of labourers (11<sup>28</sup>) apparently of his own tribe. He was clearly a man of capacity and energy and the ambitions he probably cherished of putting himself at the head of a revolutionary movement would find welcome encouragement in the appeal

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of Ahijah. Falling, not without good reason, under the suspicion of Solomon, he was obliged to flee for his life to Egypt, where he remained till the death of Solomon. Then, as the Greek version informs us (11<sup>43</sup>), he returned to his native city.

At Shechem, a great political and religious centre not far from Jeroboam's native town, the people assembled to lay their grievances before Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and to elect him king should he deal with them justly. They complain bitterly of the forced labour to which his father had subjected them, and asked that it be, not indeed abolished, but lightened. Rehoboam at first consulted the elders (so the Greek version) who represented the rights and dignity of the people. They discreetly advised him to give the people a conciliatory answer. He then was foolish enough to consult his young and haughty courtier friends, who urged him to a reply so insolent that it could not but sting self-respecting and liberty-loving men to the quick. (The "scorpion," verse 11, was a spiked whip.) This reply was the turning-point in the history of the kingdom; it was instantly answered by a shout of rebellion, and Adoniram, overseer of the forced labour (4<sup>6</sup>, 5<sup>14</sup>), was stoned to death. Rehoboam, seeing his life to be in imminent peril, hurried to Jerusalem. This gave his opportunity to Jeroboam, who, not improbably, from his place in the background was pulling the strings. He was sent for, and made king over Israel as distinct from Judah.

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From that day Israel and Judah went different ways, each with a king of its own.

We learn from the passage : 1. That tyranny is the road to revolution. No good citizen wishes to shirk his fair share of the burdens, taxes, etc., of his community ; but these obligations must be imposed, not for the aggrandizement of one (man or class), but for the good of the whole. If the welfare of the citizens is not consulted or considered, sooner or later there will be revolution ; and government is good only in proportion as it is just to all, oppresses none, and considers the welfare of the whole. 2. Force is futile in the end. " My father chastised you with whips " — this is Rehoboam's own description of his father's methods,—" but I will chastise you with scorpions " (spiked whips). The man who said that was soon running for his life. Whips and scorpions do not settle permanently any political issue. Victorious nations would do well to remember this, that the world can only be securely built upon a humane regard for the reasonable rights of all, including those who may be temporarily under their power. 3. The providence of God in history, even in its most bewildering and calamitous events. The historian has faith enough to believe that the disruption, unfortunate though it seemed, was yet " a thing brought about of Jehovah." In point of fact, Judah, by her separation from Israel, was able to maintain Hebrew religion upon a purer level, and to carry it beyond the

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catastrophe of exile which befell the northern kingdom in 721 B.C. Similarly, the unjust demands of England led to the separation and independence of America; and this, too, when we consider the splendid subsequent development of America and the mighty tasks which yet await her, was surely a thing over-ruled by the Lord. So even the great catastrophes and upheavals of our own time, we take courage to believe, will yet be made contributory to some wider brotherhood, some larger and friendlier union of the nations, some far-reaching purpose of the Lord.

### THE SORROWFUL END OF A BRILLIANT REIGN

(2 Chron. 26)

Uzziah, the glory of whose long and brilliant reign (782-740 B.C.) is to some extent reflected in this chapter, and also in the second chapter of Isaiah, had early in life come under the influence of one Zechariah who, as the Greek version of verse 5 reads, "instructed him in the fear of the Lord," and the implication is that this explains the excellence of his conduct.

Now, it is a deeply rooted belief of the Chronicler that piety is rewarded by prosperity; consequently we are to regard the success which attended Uzziah's efforts alike in peace and in war (6-15) as the natural result of his "setting himself to seek God" (verse 5). His first recorded successes in war were against the

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Philistines, the people who, lying immediately to the west of Judah, had been a thorn in their side as far back as the days of the Judges (*cf.* Samson, Eli Samuel). He seriously crippled their power by destroying the wall of some of their principal cities. Certain other tribes, also to the south, which had interfered with the commerce of Judah, he reduced to the position of tributaries. These military enterprises were matched by equally competent undertakings for the defence and the agricultural development of the homeland. In the reign of Uzziah's father a large portion of the wall of Jerusalem had been destroyed by a king of Israel whom he had foolishly challenged (25<sup>23</sup>); Uzziah therefore took the precaution to strengthen the city by erecting and fortifying towers at the northwest and southwest gates and at various other angles of the walls. The defences consisted of engines capable of discharging arrows and huge stones, and the army, which was large, was carefully organized and thoroughly equipped. But, in accordance with the principle that the stability of a country depends as much upon its agricultural development as upon its military strength, Uzziah took practical steps to advance the agricultural interests of Judah; and he also had towers built in the desert, as is still done by the modern Turks, in order to keep the wandering tribes in check and to hold the roads across the desert open.

But success is always dangerous, and sometime



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fatal, to character, and there is a profound religious philosophy in the Chronicler's simple words, "When Uzziah was strong, his heart was lifted up." His pride expressed itself in an invasion of the prerogative of the priests. By the later law at any rate the privilege of offering incense was restricted to the high priests (Exod. 30<sup>7</sup>), and this right Uzziah attempted to exercise. From the story of the reformation of Joash it is clear that the Hebrew kings of those days claimed considerable jurisdiction over the priests (2 Kings 12<sup>7</sup>), but this particular claim was instantly and emphatically challenged by the high priest, accompanied by a body of eighty priests. A very dramatic moment it must have been when the head of the Church and the head of the State thus faced each other, and one can well believe that the proud soul of the prosperous king was stirred to wrath by the priestly challenge. Suddenly and mysteriously, however, there arose upon his angry brow the spot of leprosy, like the sun in the morning sky. It seemed as if the priestly condemnation were now confirmed by heaven itself, and at once the awe-struck priests thrust him out of the temple—himself nothing loath to go; for if custom and law excluded the leper from the community, how much less could his defiling presence be tolerated in the holy house of God! From that day on the government was taken over by his son Jotham, who acted as regent till his father's death. It ought to be noticed that the Chronicler does not

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definitely say—and manifestly there is no possible means of proving—that Uzziah's leprosy was the divinely sent punishment for his invasion of the high priestly prerogative; but that is clearly the implication of the narrative. The leprosy and the invasion are both facts, and it is in accordance with the Chronicler's view of God and the world to connect these two as effect and cause, just as in the earlier part of the chapter he had explained the king's prosperity by his piety. But the Book of Kings, which is 300 years earlier than the Book of Chronicles, does not attribute the king's leprosy to this or any other sin (2 Kings 15<sup>5</sup>); and here, as everywhere, we have to remember that the Chronicler is a preacher rather than a historian.

More even than most Biblical historians does the Chronicler write with a moral purpose, and here, as usual, it is not far to seek. (1.) He is particularly fond of showing how piety is followed by prosperity "As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper" (verse 5). There is a large measure of truth in this view of life, and it is a view which it is legitimate to impress upon the minds of children but books like Job, utterances like Luke 13<sup>2, 4</sup> and the life of our Lord who died upon the cross remind us that it is far from representing the whole truth. (2.) Prosperity easily leads to pride. "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up"; and the only preventive of pride is to remember that we have nothing which we have not received. The

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power to accomplish anything at all is not a creation of our own, but a gift from God. (3.) The wisdom of minding one's own business, and the folly and danger of interfering with other people's. In a well-organized society there is division of labour, and each man should be doing that for which he is best fitted by aptitude, inclination, training, and experience. The work of society will be best done when the king attends to his duties, and the priest is allowed to attend to his. Where the duties are specially important or sacred the interference of incompetent or unqualified persons may be not only an impropriety, but a sacrilege. (4.) The folly of acting in a passion. There is never a time when we are less competent to speak and act worthily than when we are angry. Always, but especially in critical moments, it is incumbent upon us to be masters of ourselves. Passion destroys our power of being our true selves. It stamps us as moral lepers, incompetent to govern ourselves and therefore doubly incompetent to govern the affairs of business, Church, or State.

## PSALMS, PROVERBS, AND JOB

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(Ps. 23)

THE insertion of this psalm among the Sunday-school lessons probably arises from the belief that David wrote the psalm. But this is by no means certain, as the superscriptions form no part of the psalms, and merely represent an ancient tradition. Nor does it matter ; for if it is not David's, it is somebody's. On any view of its authorship or origin it will continue to the end of time to express in terms of majestic simplicity the quiet confidence with which one who knows Jehovah to be the Shepherd of his life can face even the valley of the deep shadow. It expresses the fearless and abiding joy of one who knows himself to be the guest of God.

The psalmist thinks of his God as a Shepherd who provides food and drink, rest and protection for His poor silly sheep. The green grass, the living water, the quiet rest from the noonday heat—these are symbols of what the Great Shepherd-God can be and do for the lives that give themselves up to His guiding. The path may sometimes lead through a valley of deep gloom, but he who trusts can walk

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through it unafraid, for God walks through it with him—"Thou art with me." And this God is not only kind but strong; for, besides the staff, the great oak club is in His hand for beating off the wild beasts—symbolic of the evil forces that haunt life's paths. No wonder he was comforted amid the gloom by the sight of the rod and staff, those emblems of the power and the affection of his Shepherd.

In the last two verses of the psalm God and man are no longer Shepherd and sheep, but Host and guest. Enemies have pursued him across the cruel desert, but he finds himself safe—and here he draws his picture from the gracious usages of Arab hospitality—within the shelter of a tent, and enjoying the wondrous liberality of his divine Host. So real is his sense of God and His goodness that he feels sure he will enjoy it as long as he lives.

Of the suggestions in which the psalm abounds, four may be selected. (1) The psalm is not a prayer, but a confession of faith. The psalmist does not pray the Lord to feed, guide, and protect him; he is conscious of enjoying the divine bounty, guidance, and shelter already. We are not right with God until we can make every word of this psalm our own confession of faith. Can you do this? If not, why not? (2) Jesus is "the Good Shepherd" (John 10<sup>11</sup>). Go over the psalm again, putting Jesus for the Lord, and thinking all the while of Him, and mark how clear and vivid the words become when filled with His presence. (3) In verse 6 the word rendered by

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“follow” is in the original the far more graphic “pursue.” It suggests that close upon the heel of every man are two angels, Goodness and Mercy pursuing him and determined to find him. Could there be any more striking picture of the insistence of the divine love? (4) The “valley of the shadow of death” (verse 4) should rather be perhaps “the valley of the deep shadow.” But note how the psalm, so far from losing, actually gains by this interpretation. For there are many gloomy valleys which we shall have to pass through—sorrow, disappointment, bereavement—before we reach the last and darkest of them all; and the psalm gives the assurance that in all of them, and not in the last only, the Lord will be the great Companion.

### THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

(Ps. 32)

Since the titles form no part of the original psalms there is and there can be no guarantee that this psalm came from David; but as it does admirably express the pain and confusion created for a conscience by unconfessed sin, and the sense of instant relief and joy that confession and forgiveness bring, it is placed not unnaturally after the story of David's great sin and confession (2 Sam. 11 f.). It is the second of the seven so-called penitential psalms (the others being 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). The great Augustine “often read this psalm with weeping heart and eyes.

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and before his death had it written upon the wall which was over against his sick-bed, that he might be exercised and comforted by it in his sickness."

The first two verses describe the blessedness of forgiveness, the next three the pain of sin unconfessed and the relief of confession. Verses 6 and 7 vividly picture the blessing open to all who confess, and verse 8 conveys to them the assurance of divine guidance in the pilgrimage of life. The next verse sets forth the folly of obstinacy, and the last two the joy of the righteous. Perhaps we shall catch best the meaning of the psalm by attempting to put it into language of our own, thus : How happy is the man who confesses with sincerity, and whose sin is forgiven, for the Lord imputes no guilt to him (1 f.). So long as my lips were sealed against confession I wasted away with my ceaseless crying. Day and night Thy hand lay heavy upon me ; my life was dried up like a brook in the summer heat. But the moment I resolved to confess my sin openly and hide it no more, that moment didst Thou remove the guilt thereof (3-5). Knowing as I do the joy of forgiveness, I would fain urge every godly one to pray to Thee in time of trouble, that he may not be overtaken by the rushing waters. To them, as to me, Thou canst be a shelter, preserving them from danger and bringing deliverance on every side (6 f.). There comes to me, too, this assurance from my God : "I will give thee wisdom," He says, "and teach thee henceforward the way thou shouldst go, with My

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gracious eye steadfastly upon thee" (8). But if God is to forgive, men must gladly yield themselves to the discipline divine, and not rebel like the senseless brutes, which have to be controlled by bit and bridle, else they cannot be brought nigh (9). So the secret of blessedness is trust in God. He whose trust is in Him will experience the love of God on every hand, while the godless have sorrows many. Be glad therefore in your God, and rejoice in Him O Israel ; yea, shout for very joy (10 f.).

The theme of the psalm is, broadly, forgiveness—its conditions and results. 1. (a) The fundamental condition is that there be a deep sense of sin. If sin means little or nothing to a man, then forgiveness will mean little or nothing ; and we greatly need to-day a revival of the sense of sin, which is another way of saying a revival of the sense of God. In the first two verses it is said or implied that sin is : rebellion, a missing of the mark, a moral distortion, a burden, a blot, a debt. It creates pain, unrest, and sorrow ; it confuses and withers the life ; and where this consciousness is not present there can be no joy of forgiveness. (b) The next condition is confession. To be obstinately silent, to wait till one is driven to behave like a mule (verse 9) ; the truly human thing is to confess, and the Hebrew words of verse 1 suggest that confession was followed by a sense of instant relief. 2. (a) One effect of forgiveness is the sweet sense of deliverance and security (6 f.). The forgiven man knows God to be his shelter, he feels



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himself defended by the divine love, and is sure that, though the waters of affliction or sorrow rage and foam, they cannot overwhelm him. (*b*) He has the consciousness of divine guidance (verse 8). Walking now with God, he walks in the light, and sees clearly; wherever he goes, the kindly eye of God is upon him. (*c*) The most striking effect is a great strange gladness. The joy of the angels over the penitent and forgiven sinner can hardly be greater than the joy of the sinner himself; and how exuberant is its expression in this psalm! Oh, how happy the man whose sin is forgiven! so happy that he cannot keep it to himself. He longs for others to share his gladness and security (verse 6), and calls upon his redeemed friends to shout for joy (verse 11).

Already in the Old Testament the experience is anticipated which is described in 1 John 1<sup>8</sup>, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," which is but the Christian counterpart of the saying in Proverbs 28<sup>13</sup>: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."

### THE LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY

(Ps. 85 and 126)

These two psalms (85 and 126) seem to come from the very early post-exilic period, perhaps about

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520 B.C. ; roughly speaking, about twenty years after the return from exile in Babylon. The first three verses of each psalm look back wistfully to some happy deliverance (no doubt from exile) which the people interpreted as the sign of their God's returning favour ; but the remaining verses of both psalms show that they were written in times of deep national gloom, when the divine anger, which had been temporarily lifted, seemed to have returned again. Verse 12 of Psalm 85 has been held by some to point to a drought, and both psalms reproduce with remarkable fidelity the temper and background of the little book of Haggai (about 520), which should be read in connection with the psalms. There, too, the atmosphere of the people is one of depression and despondency. A heavy drought had come upon the land (Haggai 1<sup>9-11</sup>), and the mood of the people is summed up in the simple but sorrowful words : " Ye have sown much, and bring in little ; ye looked for much, and lo ! it came to little " (1<sup>6, 9</sup>). The connection between the two parts of Psalm 85 becomes clearer if for " hast " we read " hadst " or " didst," as in my translation in *The Psalms in Modern Speech* :

Once, Lord, Thou didst favour Thy land,  
Granting change of fortune to Jacob,  
Forgiving the guilt of Thy people  
And covering all their sin,  
Withdrawing all Thy fury,  
And turning from Thy hot anger.

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Restore us, O God, our Saviour,  
Put away Thy displeasure against us.  
Wilt Thou cherish Thine anger against us forever,  
Prolonging Thy wrath unto all generations ?

Wilt Thou not revive us again  
That Thy folk may be glad in Thee ?  
Show us Thy kindness, O God,  
And grant us Thy salvation.

The anger of the Lord had been expressed in the captivity of His people, and in their restoration to their native land they read His favour and forgiveness (85<sup>1-3</sup>). But how different are the national fortunes now (4-6), with drought, failure, persecution, obstruction, and opposition from the jealous and hostile neighbouring peoples. It would seem as if joy had vanished forever ; but the poet refuses to despair. He still cherishes the hope that the God who had so signally shown His kindness in the past will show it again and grant them salvation from the sorrows, the distresses, the enemies that beset them. The same gloom darkens and the same hope shines through Psalm 126. A deliverance so great had been wrought for Israel that the very heathen had been astonished ; but now tears are upon their faces ; yet they go forth to their sowing with hope, thinking of the happy days when they shall bring back their sheaves with rejoicing.

The psalmist waits for an answer to his prayer, sure that, when it comes, it will be one of peace, *i.e.* welfare—at least to those who are truly His

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people, *i.e.* his saints, who, as the Greek version says, “turn their hearts to Him.” The salvation, which at the moment may seem far enough away, is near them that fear Him, and glory, of which no ray can now be seen, will soon dwell in the land (85<sup>8-13</sup>). And surely never was there a finer description of the things that constitute a nation’s true glory than in the last four verses of the psalm—especially in verses 10 and 11, verses which become very luminous, attractive, and profound, if for “mercy and truth” we substitute the words “kindness and faithfulness” or “loyalty,” which do a little more justice to the meaning, as in the translation referred to :

Kindness and loyalty meet ;  
Peace and righteousness kiss.  
Loyalty springs from the earth ;  
Righteousness looks from the sky.

It is a picture of supreme beauty. The kindness and the loyalty which, be it noted, spring “from the earth” are qualities which the restored people are to show to one another ; and on such a nation must rest the blessing of heaven, or—as the poet beautifully puts it—righteousness and peace look down upon it like smiling angels from the windows of heaven.

Both psalms are prayers for national welfare, and they reveal—especially the 85th—(1) the conditions, and (2) the nature of that welfare. (1) Never more than to-day did the torn and distracted nations of

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the world need to lay to heart the lessons of this psalm. With nations, as with men, welfare and success depend in the long run on character. It is not the nations that defy the moral order, but the nations that care most deeply for the moralities and sanctities of life, that win the truest prosperity and a secure place in the world's esteem ; not the nations eager to extend their own power by challenging and destroying the power of others, but those which seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness and the peace which that kingdom, if universally sought, would bring to all. It is the nations which understand that there can be no true "glory in the land" which does not put religion, honour, morality first—the nations, in other words, who "fear Him, and turn their hearts to Him." The great future is theirs. (2) The nature of national welfare. Nations, like men, often set their hearts upon the wrong things ; and, in a way as beautiful as it is solemn, the psalm brings all of us back to sanity by reminding us that the greatest crop any country can grow is a crop of good men. The only prosperity for which a true patriotism cares is the prosperity which goes hand in hand with a fair civic life. It will not despise rich crops and large flocks. It will rejoice when the land "yields her increase" ; but before and above that, it will value growth of character ; crops of "kindness and loyalty" must also spring from the land.

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## THE TRAGEDY OF INTEMPERANCE

(Prov. 23<sup>19-21</sup>, 29-35)

“This paragraph,” says Professor Toy, speaking more particularly of verses 29-35, “gives the fullest and liveliest description of drunkenness in the Old Testament.” Perhaps the most disgusting scene of all is that painted by Isaiah in 28<sup>8-10</sup>, where he shows us staggering priests and prophets, with reeling steps and reeling judgment, and “tables full of vomit and filthiness.” The peculiar horror of that picture is that the men who so degraded and disgraced themselves were the professional leaders of the country’s religious life. The interest of the passage in Proverbs is of a more general kind: it describes in a series of vivid pictures the helpless bewilderment to which indulgence in strong drink reduces a man.

Verses 19-21, which affectionately address the reader as “my son,” as though the words came from a loving and anxious father, constitute a warning not only against wine, but against gluttony; for

“Gorging and drink make men paupers,  
And drowsiness covers with rags.”

Often enough the Book of Proverbs takes occasion to hold the lazy man up to ridicule (*cf.* 6<sup>6-11</sup>) and to denounce indolence as one of the sins which lead straight to poverty and misery. But this is not exactly what is meant here: By “drowsiness” is meant that sleepy-headedness which follows in the

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wake of excessive eating and especially of indulgence in liquor. Habitual indolence tends to paralyse alertness and to destroy the capacity for work; and any form of indulgence which creates or fosters indolence sets a man therefore on the road that leads to poverty—for the day is coming when, if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. The warning contained in these three verses is a valuable piece of social diagnosis which countries that do not wish to encourage parasites would do well to lay to heart.

The next passage (29-35) is more elaborate. Through verses 29 and 30 we get a glimpse of a banquet at which men are sitting late into the night over their wine, with dull red eyes, till they have developed the quarrelsome temper and come to blows, "wounds without cause"—that is blows which men could have spared themselves had they had the sense to keep away from the wine-cup. Then follows the familiar warning :

Look not on the ruddy wine,  
When in the cup it sparkles.  
Smoothly it glideth down ;  
But at last it bites like a serpent,  
And stingeth like an adder.

Strong drink has the same strange fascination and the same venomous and deadly power as a serpent. The point of the comparison lies in the silence and treachery, the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack, and in the deadly issue of it all. The man

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who is stung by one or the other is poisoned, and, as poisoned, doomed.

The passage goes on to hold up to scorn the drunkard's besotted helplessness and bewilderment, his inability to direct his powers, his lack of control over his imagination, his reason, his speech. His head is giddy, his gait is uncertain, he behaves like a man in a boat tossed upon an angry sea.

Strange things thine eyes behold,  
Thy mind and thy speech go a-wandering.  
Like one riding the sea art thou  
In the throes of a violent storm.<sup>1</sup>

The last verse sets the drunkard in the most pathetic light of all. It represents him as just beginning to wake up out of his debauch, but as still so steeped in his besotted stupidity that he is all unconscious of the blows with which he was beaten in the quarrel over the cups. So far is he from feeling any sense of shame at the bestial level to which his appetite has brought him that his one desire is to get back to his carouse again.

The passage, brief as it is, constitutes a vivid and eloquent indictment of the drink fiend. In unforgettable pictures and withering words it brings before us the awful power of drink to render a man lazy, incompetent, stupid, and helpless, to deprive him of his power of reason and coherent speech, and

<sup>1</sup> This translation rests in part upon the Greek text, which seems preferable to the Hebrew here.



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even of the feeling of remorse or the desire to do better. He stands before us as a nuisance and a disgrace to himself and to society. And the power that can reduce men to such a level must be fought with the same resourcefulness and the same relentlessness as we should bring against an enemy who would seek the ruin of our land; for this is ruin indeed, as terrible and tragic as any that can be wrought by the invasion of an alien foe. Until this enemy can be destroyed root and branch, it is idle to hope or plan for the reconstruction of our shattered world.

### LIGHT UPON LIFE'S MYSTERY

(The Book of Job)<sup>1</sup>

There is no book in the Bible to compare with the Book of Job for the merciless candour with which the perplexing facts of the moral world are faced. To those who reach their faith too lightly, or to those who have too little sympathy with the struggles of others toward the light, its inexorable logic should come as a reminder that the world is, after all, a riddle, and no man, by searching, can fully find it out. A solution, to be worth anything, has to be

<sup>1</sup> The book is here treated as a whole. But the teacher or preacher could deal with it fruitfully by dividing it into four or five sections and discussing each section separately, thus: (1) A good man prostrate (chaps. 1 and 2); (2) Search for the reason why (chaps. 3-27: 3-14, 15-21, 22-27; to which might be added 28 and 32-37); (3) The appeal to God (chaps. 29-31); (4) The answer of God (chaps. 38-41); (5) The restoration (chap. 42).

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reached by a fair consideration of all the relevant facts, however appalling or disconcerting they be; and certainly no one can accuse the great author of the Book of Job of blinking the facts. Job has the Protestant mind and temper. He is not content, like Bildad (8<sup>8, 9</sup>), with admitting that "we are but of yesterday and know nothing," and therefore that we must humbly acquiesce in "that which the fathers have searched out." No! He has the same right to search as they had; or rather, not so much the right as the duty, to neglect which is to be guilty of treason to God (13<sup>7, 8</sup>), and to his own deepest self. He will hear with his own ears, and his "mouth will taste meat for itself" (12<sup>11</sup>).

The problem of the book is many-sided. It may be considered as an attempt to answer the question whether there is such a thing as disinterested religion (1<sup>9</sup>)—a question which it answers by showing us a man who clings to God—the God of conscience, if not the God of convention—when he has been stripped of everything else that men hold dear. But, in its larger aspect, the problem of the book is how the prosperity of bad men, and, still more, the sufferings of good men, are to be reconciled with the justice of God. In one of his more bitter and passionate moods Job roundly asserts that God has no regard for moral distinctions. "It is all the same; He destroys the innocent and the guilty alike" (9<sup>22</sup>). Indeed, much of the argument of Job, especially when he is warped by his passion

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(15<sup>12</sup>) and his soul is aflame with a furious sense of wrong, is to the effect that there is no moral order at all. It is not only that God seems to be indifferent, but the moral world is actually turned upside down ; for " it is the tents of robbers that prosper, and they that provoke God that are secure " (12<sup>6</sup>). Such utterances, impossible to the New Testament, show the amazing and, shall we say, refreshing frankness of the discussion, and with what a passionate desire this great poet-heart was filled to find the truth, if it was ever to be found at all, by an impartial consideration of all the facts, even the most terrible and disquieting.

Did he, then, find the truth ; and if so, what was the truth he ultimately found ? In other words, what is the solution offered by the book of the great theological problem raised by suffering ? It would not be far from the truth to say that the author of this book was too great a man and too clear a thinker to suppose that he had found a solution that was in all respects adequate and satisfactory. The peace which he reaches is the peace of vision and of faith, but not of perfect knowledge. Any explanation of the moral world which presumes to make clear and intelligible all its perplexing phenomena is likely to be shallow and unsatisfactory enough, and there will always be honest men who will repudiate it with vehemence. No ! The book offers no solution in the sense that all the difficulties are resolved. The epilogue, which gives Job back his camels and sheep

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and oxen and material happiness, and makes him glad in proportion to the months in which he had seen misery, moves within the sphere of poetic justice. Such things may happen occasionally, but seldom in real life. That solution will not satisfy the hard-headed man whose eyes are set upon the tragedies rather than on the romances of life.

But if the book offers no absolute solution of the problem it raises, there are in it several very valuable hints of a solution. They are like flashes of lightning in the thick darkness, and toward the end the solution becomes rather like a gentle, steady light in which we can see clearly, not indeed all the secret that governs the relations of God with His universe, but at least part of it—a very important part of it.

One of the brilliant hints of a solution is found already in chapter 1. The author is a great dramatic poet, who knows how to make a most effective use of contrasts, and this he does with splendid dramatic power at the very beginning of his discussion, or rather before the discussion proper begins. For there is no argument till we come to the poetry in chapter 3. The first two chapters simply sketch the scene and put the hero and the *dramatis personæ* upon the stage. The first five verses describe, in the simple terms of ancient Oriental life, the piety and prosperity of Job—prosperous because pious ; so thought the ancient Hebrew. They draw a picture of a happy family ; the father so scrupulously God-fearing that he offered sacrifice for his children,

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even when he was not conscious of any definite sin on their part. This man will run no risks with God ; and so he renders his offering on their behalf, saying, "Perhaps my sons have sinned." And the family of this good man is a happy one ; that is suggested by the feasts of which the seven sons and three daughters periodically partook.

Now, with one swift and skilful stroke, verse 6 transfers the reader from earth to heaven, from the happy earthly family below to the heavenly council above, where the gods came together to present themselves before Jehovah, their chief. For seven verses the interest of the reader is entirely centred in the heavenly courts and in the discussion that there takes place. Now it is of the utmost importance to notice that the discussion above concerns the people below—in particular, Job ; and that what happens to him afterward is the immediate consequence of that discussion in the heavenly council. For here again, note the powerful effect produced in verses 13 to 19 by the dramatic contrast. With another swift stroke the author brings back his readers from heaven to earth. As soon as the Satan leaves the council the cruel blows rain thick and fast upon the patriarch.

Here, then, is a hint, and surely more than a hint, of a solution. Job himself does not know the reason of his calamities ; he goes on to utter his sorrowful plaint in chap. 3 because he does not know the key to them which the author, with great skill, has

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put into the hands of the reader before the discussion begins at all. Job does not know ; nor do the friends. They think and say, with increasing plainness, that the root of Job's calamities is in himself and his sin. Job denies this, though he does not pretend to understand them. And surely nothing could be more touching than this : to watch these men discussing round the ash-heap outside the village, exhausting all the resources of dialectic ingenuity in their attempt to expound Job's misfortune, when all the while the real explanation is to be found, not below, but above ; not in earth, but in heaven ; not in some sin of Job, but in some purpose of God. What a scene this might make for a painter of genius ; the four angry men below, talking, with somewhat of foolishness and irrelevance ; and the heavenly council above, to whose discussions and decisions were ultimately due the facts which occasioned the problem.

Herder has happily said, " Above is the action, below the discussion." Job and the friends do not know of the divine purpose, and that explains their confusion. Their eyes are upon the earth, not upon the heavens, and therefore they do not clearly see, indeed they hardly see at all, the meaning of the things upon the earth. Is there not here a helpful hint toward a solution ? The sorrows and misfortunes of this world are not to be accounted for without reference to some heavenly purpose. To explain what is below we dare not forget what is

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above. What is above we do not and cannot completely know, for the divine purpose is unsearchable to merely mortal minds and hearts ; but there is something above, there is some divine purpose, which, if we knew it all, would explain and illumine the sorrow below. Earth and its tragedies cannot be understood apart from heaven and its purposes. That is the first gleam of a solution in the Book of Job.

Further light is shed upon the mystery of suffering by the consideration that it is a test of fidelity. The Satan had insinuated that Job was a pious man only because piety paid. It was worth his while to be good, because God had set a hedge about him and his house, so that no hostile power could break through, and He had abundantly blessed the work of Job's hands. Satan was right in insinuating that the true test of Job's piety could come only when these blessings were withdrawn. The ancient Hebrew was too prone to identify God with His gifts, especially His material gifts, to find Him in them, and only in them ; to find in them the reward of piety, and in the withdrawal of them the sign of the divine anger. Did Job love God for His own sake or for the sake of His gifts ? It will be very easy to settle that question, says Satan, though in his own mind he has really no doubt as to what the result will be ; withdraw the gifts and then see whether Job will still hold fast to his integrity. Whether Job loves God with a pure love or not will be clearly

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seen the moment he has nothing but God. When he is reduced to the condition in which he has nothing but God, will he be content with God? The measure in which he can stand that test will be the measure of his piety. Strip him of what he has and then we shall see what he is.

There can be no doubt that this is one use of suffering. It reveals a man to himself. How much of it can he stand without wavering in his faith in God? There are many whose faith yields at the first touch; others who can hold out longer, but who yield in the end, and the fewest who maintain their trust in God when the heaven is brass above them. It is clear, from Satan's procedure, that he imagined that the heavier the pressure the more likely would be Job's faith to give way. He does not consider himself irretrievably defeated after Job has successfully stood the first four furious assaults upon his prosperity and family. He argues: God has only touched what the man has, but not yet the man himself. Let Him but lay a heavy hand, not on Job's property, but on his person, and then at the last his piety will vanish. Or, as a corollary, if it does not vanish, then it must be more than ordinarily profound and true.

Suffering, then, is a test of fidelity. A truly pious man can stand it without losing faith in God: a man of superficial piety will give way before it. In either case it is a revealer of the man to himself. Moreover, fidelity in suffering is one means whereby



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men may glorify God, and convince others of the power and reality of true religion. Satan assumes that, if the pressure be only severe enough, Job will not stand fast : he will not love God enough to be content with Him alone. On the other hand, if he does stand fast, how great and glorious must that God be in whom Job persists in believing, though all signs of His love are withdrawn, and with whom he is content even when he is stripped of all things ! The greater the fidelity, the greater the glory that redounds to God, and the more overwhelming becomes the conviction that religion is a thing of reality, power, and consolation.

But there is more. It is not till the author nearly reaches the end that he makes his most daring and splendid attempt toward a solution. If he has a real answer anywhere to the moral problems that stirred him to write his book it is in the sublime speeches of Jehovah in chaps. 38 and 39. Job has had his say and the friends have had theirs ; it is now Jehovah's turn to speak. The utterances of Job were marked by a passionate sincerity, but he has no explanation of his misery, except that, in one wild moment, he says that God made him only to destroy him (10<sup>8-13</sup>). His speeches are full of questions—whys and wherefores—to which he can see no answer on this side the grave. The speeches of the friends, on the other hand, altogether conventional as they are, are utterly inadequate to silence the frank and fearless spirit of Job ; and, to support their shallow

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theories of life, Eliphaz, the oldest and wisest of them, does not hesitate to invent slanderous lies (22<sup>6-9</sup>; cf. 29<sup>12ff.</sup>). In this inextricable confusion the solemn words of Jehovah, ushered in by the storm, are peculiarly welcome.

But the first impression produced upon the reader by the speeches of Jehovah is one of surprise and disappointment. It seems as if Job, who has just been overwhelmed by the friends, has again and more completely to be overwhelmed by the God for whose appearance he had so passionately prayed (31<sup>35-37</sup>). At first sight there seems to be not the faintest gleam of light upon Job's terrible problem. His hopeful upturned face is met by a pitiless hail of questions—"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? hast thou entered the treasures of the snow? knowest thou the laws of heaven?" etc.—questions whose keen irony must have cut to the heart of the unhappy man. Job's darkness, dark enough before, is now such as might be felt. When we think of the ruined man, bereft of family and property, misunderstood and forsaken by friends, wasting away under the scourge of his relentless and incurable leprosy, the questions urged by Jehovah, which have no relation whatever to the facts of Job's case, seem little short of cruel. Jehovah does not condescend to say now (though He does afterward, cf. 42<sup>7</sup>) that Job was right; and for the moment it looks as if heaven and earth were leagued against Job.

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But it is not so. Even if we put the sternest possible interpretation upon the speech of Jehovah it amounts simply to this : that the whole universe is a mystery. First, the wonders of the inanimate creation, the sea, the hail, the snow, the light (chap. 38), and then the wonders of the animate creation (chap. 39), are passed before Job, and he has silently to confess that he cannot explain even the simplest and most familiar phenomenon of either creation. In this way, with marvellous skill, Job is lifted out of his own misery to contemplate the great and splendid panorama of the universe. Is his suffering a mystery ? Why, the whole universe is a mystery, and his individual sorrow is—not indeed swallowed up, but more than half forgotten—in the sense of this infinite mystery of which his sorrow is but a tiny part. He cannot adequately understand any simple fact of the physical world ; how then shall he hope to understand the far more complicated problems of the moral world ? His “whys and wherefores” are made to seem just a little ridiculous, or rather, we should say, a little pathetic against the “Where wast thou” and “Knowest thou” of Almighty God. There is a sense in which this solution, meagre as it is, might almost be called a Christian solution. It is at any rate a rebuke to the self-centred spirit, a call to lose the sense of self in the larger life of the world.

But this alone would never be enough. It would be no consolation to Job, in his misery, to be made

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to feel that all life was mysterious if the mystery were cruel. But the speech of Jehovah, when read sympathetically, suggests that at the heart of this mystery is wisdom. “Who is this that darkeneth *counsel* by words without knowledge ? ” (38<sup>2</sup>) The world is a wise and stable world. Its foundations are well laid, the sea is confined within bounds. There is evidence everywhere of an omnipotence which is controlled by wisdom ; and Job, in spite of his incisive questions, cannot explain any single part of it, far less how it might be improved.

That is indeed much, but even that is not enough. The speech of Jehovah suggests, with the utmost delicacy and beauty, that at the heart of the mystery of the universe is not only wisdom, but love. Nothing could be finer than the subtle suggestion of the love of God who “causes the rain to fall upon a land where no man is, and on the wilderness wherein there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate ground, and to make the thirsty land sprout with new green ” (38<sup>26-27</sup>). God so loves the waste and desolate ground where no man is that He sends His rain upon it ; and if He clothe it with grass, how much more will He not clothe you, O ye of little faith ! A similar touch—this time, however, affecting the animal creation—is found in 38<sup>39f</sup>. “Dost thou hunt the prey for the lioness, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions ? ” Man would rather slay than feed the lion ; nevertheless the lion, like the wilderness, is under the kindly providence of

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God. Within this universal love of God, shown even to the meaner things of His creation, Job and his misery are comprehended ; and it is not surprising that this new vision of the universe humbled and prostrated him (42<sup>5-6</sup>). The universe is a mystery, and in some sense a mystery it must always remain ; but it is at once an inspiration and a consolation to be fully persuaded in our own minds that at the heart of the mystery are wisdom and love.

## THE PROPHETS

### MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

(Amos I and 2)

AMOS delivered his message to Israel during the brilliant and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, about the year 750 B.C., and his book constitutes one of the most vivid pictures of ancient Hebrew society—a society in many essential respects astonishingly like our own. His message throughout is that the guilty civilization of his time would be speedily brought to a violent end. He helps us very clearly to feel that the chief function of a prophet is not to predict, but to challenge the national conscience and to tell his country the truth about itself (*cf.* Micah 3<sup>8</sup>).

But the great moral laws, for the violation of which his country stood condemned in the sight of God, were operative not in Israel only but over the whole world. It is no surprise therefore to find that Amos is a man of international mind, with an eye for and an interest in the doings of men far beyond the borders of Israel. Indeed, the whole of the first chapter and the first paragraph of the second (2<sup>1-3</sup>) are taken up with a lurid sketch of the cruelties of other nations, and the pronouncement of their

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inevitable doom. From the very beginning we are made to feel the compass and sweep of God's purpose, and the universality of His moral laws. National gods were the fashion in the ancient world, but it is no national god for whom Amos pleads; it is the international or rather supra-national God, the God of us all, who has no favourites, but demands a moral service from all, and will in the end hurl to destruction the nation that defies His laws.

Amos could say many damning things about each of the countries he indicts—their transgressions are three, four, many; but in each case he singles out only one as typical; and it is highly significant that the crime he chooses to select is cruelty. War (I<sup>3</sup>) and the wicked slave-trade (I<sup>6, 9</sup>) furnished abundant opportunities for this; and the naturally ferocious Semites used these opportunities to the full. Women were treated with inconceivable devilry (I<sup>13</sup>), and the great primal instinct of respect for the dead was barbarously flouted (2<sup>1</sup>). Now to the God whom Amos worships these things are intolerable, and the people who practise them are doomed. Upon nation after nation the prophet pronounces his sentence in a word which rings with weird reiteration through the refrain with which each of the oracles is closed: "I will not turn it back." He does not say what it is that God will not turn back; but manifestly he is alluding to that terrible penalty which inevitably follows in the trail of sin. On it comes, and God will not stop it. Why should

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He ? for that is the law by which He administers the world.

Amos's audience would be delighted to hear of the doom that was to overtake the hated peoples that surrounded her : they do not know that he is about to leap, with his word of doom, upon them too (2<sup>4-16</sup>). How angry they would be when they discovered that this was the climax of his argument. It is not for nothing that Amos begins with peoples beyond the borders of Israel ; he means his people to feel that they are living in a world where moral law is universal, and where every sin, by whatsoever people committed, is inexorably punished.

His revelation of Israel's sin (2<sup>6-12</sup>) is much more intimate and detailed than that of the other peoples, for Israel is his own people ; it is the national life of his own country that he is supremely concerned to challenge. Once more it is cruelty that Amos denounces—this time the cruelties of peace ; he wants us to feel that the crimes of our seemingly quiet civilization may be just as dreadful as the cruelties of war. His very first words reveal his passionate interest in the poor ; nothing angers him like the wrong done to them, whether by lawyers, employers, or merchants. The paragraph vividly illustrates the prevalent vices of those days—immorality and intemperance—which were both indulged in within the very sanctuaries themselves ; and the nazirites, who were the prohibitionists of the time, were insulted.



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This, then, was the corrupt civilization which Amos declared was doomed. Nor was this an idle threat. The fire which again and again he announces that Jehovah will send is the fire of war ; that, too, is clearly in Amos's mind in the threat which closes chap. 2 (verses 13-16). He means that the Assyrians will come and bring the devastations and horrors of war upon the wicked land. And come they did within thirty years, laying Israel's capital, Samaria, in ruins (721 B.C.) and bringing the monarchy, and with it their political existence, to an end.

Points worthy of special interest are (1) Amos's international outlook—he sees far beyond his own land ; (2) his appeal to the universal conscience—he does not blame the nations for failing to conform to any written law, but to the law written on the heart ; (3) his candour—the true patriot is not the man who flatters his nation, but the man who tells it the truth ; (4) his interest in the poor—notice the implied horror of the “ palaces ” in the refrain throughout chap. 1.

### PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD

(Amos 3 and 4)

These chapters continue the theme of Israel's sin and doom initiated in chap. 2—“ I will punish you for all your iniquities ” (3<sup>2</sup>). Amos's audience must have resented his message of doom, for were they not Jehovah's peculiar and exclusive people ? “ Are

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we not the people whom Jehovah cares for supremely out of all the families of the earth ? ” So be it, says Amos ; therefore all the more will He punish you for your sins (3<sup>2</sup>)—a daring and original thought, which to the people must have seemed the rankest heresy. For to them Jehovah was a national God, pledged to their unconditional prosperity, while to Amos He was a moral God, who could not and would not let sin go unpunished. The people indignantly demand Amos’s warrant for so bold a heresy. My warrant, he answers, is this, that my message has been given me by God and I simply cannot help declaring it. “The Lord Jehovah hath spoken : who can help prophesying ? ” (3<sup>8</sup>) His message is the natural and inevitable effect of God’s word to his soul through the events of the time. It is but an illustration of that reign of law which pervades the physical and moral universe and which Amos proceeds further to expound in a striking and curious passage by illustrations drawn from various phases of life, in peace and war, in town and country, among birds and beasts. Law is everywhere, because God is everywhere (3<sup>3-6</sup>).

Then Amos returns to the attack. The oppression practised upon the poor by the grandees of Samaria (the capital of Israel) is such that even the heathen hearts of Ashdod and Egypt would be shocked could they witness it. The doom, as before, is invasion and destruction at the hands of an enemy (the Assyrians), who would make short work of all their

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effeminate splendour. Only a few fragments of that brilliant civilization would survive by which it could be identified—fragments comparable to the legs of a sheep or a piece of its ear which was all that was left when the lion had torn it. And Amos pronounces this awful doom no less upon the houses of worship—already we have seen why (2<sup>71.</sup>)—than upon the “palaces”; both alike are detestable (3<sup>14f.</sup>).

Unhappily, the women were as bad as the men, haughty, cruel, exploiting the poor, and given to intemperance; with almost brutal candour Amos calls them cattle. Their doom too is sealed (4<sup>1-3</sup>). We can imagine the people angrily resenting these threats and pointing, in refutation of them, to the assiduity of their worship—their sacrifices, tithes, and free-will offerings associated with sanctuaries like Bethel and Gilgal. Amos tells them that all that is irrelevance and sin: that is doubtless what you love, he says, but it is not what God loves at all (4<sup>4f.</sup>). His demand is not for gifts, but for character; and as the character of the worshippers was corrupt and cruel, He responds to their gifts by sending disaster upon disaster (4<sup>6-11</sup>).

This interesting passage, like chaps. 1<sup>3</sup>-2<sup>5</sup>, is a poem whose stanzas each close with a solemn refrain: here, “Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith Jehovah.” The various disasters enumerated—cleanness of teeth (*i.e.* famine), drought, blight, mildew, locusts, plague, war, earthquake—are conceived partly as punishment, but still more as God’s

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own call to repentance. They were designed to induce in the frivolous people a more sober and reflective spirit, to draw them back to the God from whom they had wandered. But then, as now, there were some whose frivolity was incurable, some whom not even the calamity of war could stir to a serious temper. In that case, says Amos, there is some more terrible thing in store ; and, after hinting darkly at a doom he does not name, he rings out his summons, " Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel "—the great God of the universe who controls the mighty forces of nature and whose name is Jehovah of hosts (4<sup>121</sup>).

To Amos both history and nature are full of the voices and appeals of God. The prophet's mind dwells naturally on the sterner aspects of things ; all the illustrations of the law of cause and effect but one are grim (3<sup>3-6</sup>) ; but here we see him suggesting that behind the disasters which had overtaken Israel was a purpose of love. The severity of God was designed to lead to repentance, to bring His wanderers home ; and the terrible threat which closes the appeal is delivered only after all the other warnings have gone unheeded.

Points for consideration : (1) The inexorableness of law. Amos saw law everywhere, in the physical (3<sup>3-6</sup>) and moral (3<sup>2</sup>) world alike. That is why he is so sure that Israel is doomed. " Things are what they are and their consequences will be what they will be : why should we deceive ourselves ? " (2) The divine intention of disaster—to induce in

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men a mood of seriousness, reflection, repentance, to lead them to face the ultimate things and the God behind all things. (3) The pathetic power of man to ignore or resist the sternest appeals—illustrated by the frivolous temper which not even the tragedy of the Great War has eliminated. “Yet ye have not returned unto Me.” Amos, thinking no doubt of the Assyrians, plainly hints that for the persistently impenitent there is a yet more terrible fate in store. There is a permanent truth in this. Therefore “prepare.”

### FAIR PLAY

(Amos 5 and 6)

The doom at which Amos has plainly hinted is that of a war which will ravage the land from one end to the other (6<sup>14</sup>) and decimate the population (5<sup>3</sup>), and so sure is he of it that he lifts up his lamentation in advance (5<sup>2</sup>). Some verses of the chapter seem to suggest that that doom might conceivably yet be averted; the people may be spared (5<sup>4</sup>, 6, 14), and Jehovah may be gracious (5<sup>15</sup>), but only on condition that they do really seek Him in the only way which in the eyes of Amos was worth while, *i.e.* by a healthier and juster social order (5<sup>24</sup>). But that hard way they refused to take, they preferred to tread the easier path of rite and ceremony. They made pilgrimages to the famous sanctuaries of the day (5<sup>5</sup>)—Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, hoping

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to satisfy God thus and to find Him there ; but there, of all places in Israel, according to Amos, He was most assuredly not to be found. There is something dreadful in the antithesis " Seek Me, but seek not Bethel," as if God was not in the churches of the time at all. We begin to understand these fierce words when we remember what went on in the sanctuaries of those days (2<sup>71</sup>) and how the whole order of society was honeycombed by the injustice perpetrated by the worshippers who frequented those shrines (5<sup>7</sup>). To Amos no religion was of the smallest value which did not express itself in just and decent life. Those who took bribes to prevent justice (5<sup>12</sup>), who trampled upon the poor and ground them down with excessive taxation (5<sup>11</sup>), need expect short shrift from a God to whom character was everything and ceremonial nothing.

So once more Amos hurls his threats of the doom that was to devastate the whole land, city and country alike (5<sup>16f.</sup>), laying in ruins the palatial houses and the pleasant vineyards (5<sup>11</sup>), and filling the air with sobs and lamentations. Inspired by his stern sense of the inexorableness of law, he maintains, in one of the grimmest verses of the Bible, that the doom is inescapable (5<sup>19</sup>) : the unhappy people will be like the man who fled from a lion and was met by a bear, or on reaching his house out of breath and leaning his hand wearily against the wall was suddenly bitten by a serpent. It is the prophet's fierce way of saying that there is no escape from the laws of

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God ; the nation that breaks His law must pay the penalty. Bitterly resenting these threats of doom, the people sought to refute them by pointing to the gorgeous and punctilious ceremonial of their religious services, with their vocal and instrumental music ; but the prophet, filled with indignant fury at this travesty and misconception of true worship, represents his God as answering, " I hate and despise it all. That was never my demand, was not in the time of the Exodus (5<sup>25</sup>), is not now, and never shall be. My demand then and now and evermore is that justice, righteousness, fair play, as between man and man, shall flow through the land, through every department and activity of its public and social life, like a cleansing and never-failing stream." The words of 5<sup>24</sup> are truly golden words.

Then the " woe " begins again (6<sup>1</sup>, *cf.* 5<sup>18</sup>), this time hurled at those who are at ease because they believe themselves to be safe behind their mountains. Chapter 6<sup>3-6</sup> gives us a glimpse—the most vivid in the Old Testament—of an ancient Hebrew aristocratic home. We see great social and political dignitaries indolently lolling on their gorgeous ivory-inlaid couches, feasting like gluttons, drinking wine greedily, not from slender cups, but out of capacious bowls, perfumed like dandies, revelling in improvised music of voice and instrument, but caring nothing for the people who were broken by the vices of peace.

This can end, says the prophet, only in one way—in invasion (6<sup>14</sup>) and exile (6<sup>7</sup>). How much Amos is

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moved by the sight and the thought of it all we see from 6<sup>8</sup>, where he represents the Lord as confirming the doom by a most solemn oath because of the utter detestation in which He holds the palaces and the callous and luxurious wickedness of the life which, as we have just seen, is led there. The sorrowful thing is that in the imminent national disaster the small house, the house of the poor man, shall be smashed to atoms no less than the great house; all shall go down in a common ruin (6<sup>11</sup>); and the grim scene reflected in 6<sup>9f.</sup> seems to be that of a plague-stricken house in which all have perished but one. The reason for all this is expressed in the singularly striking words: "Can horses run upon a cliff? Can the sea be ploughed with oxen?"—so we should read—"that ye have poisoned justice," etc. He means that there is a moral order as there is a physical order, and the one can be no more defied than the other. Those who defy the great moral laws of the world by promoting injustice and embittering the relations of men will come to as terrible an end as would the fool who would attempt to plough the sea with oxen.

The chapters bristle with suggestions. (1) Note Amos's fierce contempt for a religion which exhausts itself in ceremony (5<sup>5, 21, 25</sup>), and his passionate demand for a religion which will create and encourage the spirit of fair play. He abhorred the exploitation of the weak and defenceless (2<sup>6f.</sup>, 4<sup>1</sup>), and were he alive to-day, he would plead for fair play not only as



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between class and class but as between nation and nation. Vindictiveness in the one sphere is no more tolerable than exploitation in the other. (2) Here, as so often, Amos emphasizes the inexorableness of law (5<sup>19</sup> ; 6<sup>12</sup>). We are living in an ordered system, in a world of cause and effect, in a world in which sin carries a terrible and inevitable penalty, and "I will not turn it back" (1<sup>3</sup>). (3) The mark of a true patriot is not that he shouts and waves the flag, but that he is "grieved," almost literally "sick" (the word in 6<sup>6</sup> means "sick"), when his country is broken by the ravages of war, or, as it can almost more terribly be, by the vices of peace. (4) Notice the profound nature of the demand in 5<sup>15</sup>—not only "seek good and not evil," but "hate the evil, and love the good." What he asks from the citizens is not only good acts, but good dispositions ; not only worthy institutions, but noble souls. (5) Amos's solution of the social problem is not only moral, but religious ; not only "seek good" (5<sup>14</sup>), but "seek Jehovah" (5<sup>6</sup>), "seek Me" (5<sup>4</sup>). Democracy must learn that there can be no permanent solution of the social problem without God, no real brotherhood of man without an acknowledgment of the fatherhood of God.

### VISIONS OF DOOM

(Amos 7 and 8)

Amos, as we have seen, is an intensely ethical preacher, and it may at first sight seem strange to

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find him in 7<sup>1</sup>-9<sup>4</sup> as a man apparently subject to visions. But this is very easily explained. He is obsessed with the idea of the speedy and inevitable doom of Israel, and everywhere he looks he finds corroboration of that doom. The country had first experienced a plague of locusts, then a fierce and withering drought ; it is from these experiences that the prophet's first two visions start, and, fearing that the God who sent these things has some more terrible thing in store, he prays twice for forgiveness for his people, and twice his prayer is heard. Incidentally we learn from this that Amos's conception of God is not unrelievedly stern ; he has a real appreciation, though he seldom expresses it, of the forgiving love of God.

Then—his third vision—he sees one day a builder dropping a plumb-line beside a wall to test its straightness ; and, as he looks, there comes into his heart the vision of another Builder dropping his plumb-line beside the wall of Israel's national life, and finding the wall anything but straight. Down then it must come, and Amos voices his sense of the inevitable doom in words which must have sounded upon the ears of those who heard them both as high treason and blasphemy (7<sup>9</sup>) : he foretells the ruin of the churches and the destruction of the reigning dynasty. Only a man of invincible faith and courage would have dared to deliver such a message in such a place—he is speaking in Bethel (7<sup>13</sup>).

Obviously the powers that be cannot tolerate such

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talk, which can hardly do other than foment disaffection among those of revolutionary temper ; so the archbishop of Bethel, the foremost churchman of the land, immediately notifies the king that conspiracy is brewing, and with insolent superciliousness he commands Amos to leave the country and get back to Judah. But such a man as Amos is not so easily cowed. He rises up in all the elemental courage of his native manhood, and fearlessly reiterates his terrible threat, clinching it with a detailed prediction of the disaster that would overtake the archbishop's own house. It is into this speech that Amos projects the simple story of his call. Amaziah had insinuated that Amos was a professional prophet, well paid for his services by those who had hired him. Amos indignantly denies that he is a professional ; he is indeed a prophet, but only because, when he was tending his sheep and reflecting on the wickedness of the people, the purpose of God, and the meaning of contemporary events, he heard a voice bidding him go and preach, and he was irresistibly impelled to go.

Another vision follows in 8<sup>1-3</sup>, which involves a play upon the Hebrew words difficult to reproduce in English ; but it is something like this : Looking one day in the fall of the year at a basket of fruit, and obsessed as he always was by the idea of the doom of Israel, he began to see in the ripeness of the fruit a prophecy of the ripeness of the people for destruction, and to hear in the " fall " of the year a

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premonition of the fall of the people. Gloom, wailing, silence—that will be the end.

The rest of the chapter (8<sup>4-12</sup>) is more in the tone of the preaching of the earlier chapters. Again Amos's passion for the poor and the needy flashes out and especially is his anger aroused by the heartless cruelty with which they were exploited by the great grain merchants of those days, who—as verse 5 means—<sup>(1)</sup>sold underweight and <sup>(2)</sup>charged exorbitant prices, and, not content with that, <sup>(3)</sup>sold an adulterated article—“the refuse of the wheat” (8<sup>6</sup>)—robbing the <sup>reverses</sup> people at once of their money, of their rights, and of their vitality. Never was the profiteer more vividly drawn than in this passage, which pillories him for all time; and it is of surpassing interest to note that the men who treat the public with such cynical brutality are men to whom the Sabbath is a bore, men who sit loose to the obligations of the sacred days. It is no accident that those who are indifferent to God and His claims are also indifferent to man and his rights. And Amos goes grimly on, “Shall not the land tremble for this?” A land in which profiteering flourishes unchecked is not a safe place to live in, it does not rest upon solid foundations, it rocks and reels as to the tremors of an earthquake, it may stagger into revolution with all its baleful consequences for ordered life. To Amos the most sorrowful aspect of the ruin which he foresees for his country is its spiritual destitution. When the blow falls they will long for someone to

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guide them back to God; and, having stopped the mouths of the prophets (2<sup>12</sup>) and ignominiously dismissed men of the stamp of Amos himself (7<sup>12</sup>) who could and would have guided them, they may find that the blessing they have rejected and now covet is beyond their reach, though they seek it carefully with tears.

Points for consideration would be (1) the contrast between a moral and a ritualistic religion. That contrast pervades the whole book (*cf.* 5<sup>24f.</sup>), but here it is peculiarly vivid because both those types are incarnated in the persons of Amos and Amaziah—the one courageous, original, inspired, and inspiring; the other the champion of privilege, vested interests, tradition, and the established order. (2) Amos is an example of the true patriot in that he told his country the truth, though this exposed him to the charge of heresy and treason (7<sup>9</sup>). (3) The profiteer is a menace not only to the well-being but even to the security of society (8<sup>4-8</sup>).

### THE HAPPY FUTURE

(Amos 9)

The fifth and last of Amos's visions is the most terrible of all. He sees the crowded sanctuary—of Bethel perhaps—smitten by some unseen angelic hand, and fall, burying many of the worshippers beneath the ruins. The survivors seek to escape, digging down to the nether-world, climbing to

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heaven, hiding themselves in the densely wooded Carmel, throwing themselves from a cliff into the Mediterranean Sea, to hide themselves from the terrible God whom by their immoral life and their meaningless worship they have persistently insulted ; but all in vain. Wherever in the universe they go, in the heights or in the depths, on land or in the sea, they find themselves in the grasp of an Almighty Arm from which there is no escape. "There shall not one of them flee away, and there shall not one of them escape" (9<sup>1</sup>). "I will set Mine eyes upon them for evil and not for good" (9<sup>4</sup>). It is very terrible, but it is simply another assertion of Amos's doctrine of cause and effect. Certain conduct will carry certain consequences, and from them there is no escape, for God Himself has established this sequence, and "I will not turn it back." The thought of this section is just that of the omnipresence of God—the thought which had so searching and purifying effect upon the writer of Psalm 139—as coloured by the grim imagination of Amos.

As in 5<sup>21</sup>, we can imagine the people recoiling in horror from so fearful a picture of their destiny and pointing the prophet with angry pride to the exodus, which was so signal a proof of the love of God for their ancestors and so complete a refutation of Amos's sinister forebodings. Good, says Amos ; but other nations have had their exodus too ; it was the same Jehovah that brought up the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir (9<sup>7</sup>). Here, as

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in chaps. 1 and 2, Jehovah is not the God of Israel only, as the average Israelite thought, He is the supra-national God ; but Amos here expresses this thought in a way which must have seemed like a deliberate insult to his haughty and self-satisfied audience—"Are ye not as the Ethiopians unto Me ?" *i.e.* no better and no dearer than the swarthy sons of Africa. With disconcerting candour Amos here, as elsewhere, demolishes the idea that they are the favourites of heaven. God elects men and nations not to irresponsible privilege, but to duty ; or, if to privilege, then to privilege for the sake of duty.

Some scholars believe that the original book ended with the humbling questions of verse 7, or at any rate in the middle of verse 8, "Behold, the eyes of the Lord Jehovah are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth." Unquestionably either of these points would make a very dramatic ending, in thorough harmony with the stern and challenging spirit of Amos. But, as a matter of fact, the book does not now end so ; the verses that remain disclose a fairer and a happier outlook. As this, however, is conceived almost entirely in terms of material prosperity, some scholars think that they can hardly have come from the man who pled with such passion for righteousness within the social order. However that may be, the book would be incomplete without this or some similar picture. The last word of God can never be judgment ; at any rate we may safely say that that can

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never be His exclusive word. Amos urged the claims of the righteous God, the demand for justice among men, and the inexorableness of the moral law, with unparalleled power ; but those things do not exhaust all that is to be said about God and duty. This message, true and necessary as it is, has to be supplemented by the message that there is love in the universe as well as power, and that God is the God of grace as well as of majesty. Amos touches here and there upon this thought (5<sup>15</sup> ; 7<sup>3, 6</sup>), but in the main it was left to his gentler successor Hosea to develop this view. It is therefore a happy providence that the Book of Amos ends with a gracious vision of restoration and prosperity, which relieves the pervasive gloom of the book.

Besides emphasizing this point, the teacher or preacher may fittingly embrace the opportunity of calling attention to the salient features of this small but immeasurably impressive book. (1) We learn that a prophet is not so much a predictor as a preacher. The book is just a series of passionate discourses challenging the corrupt life of the time, and designed to stir the national conscience. (2) True religion has little—Amos would say, nothing—to do with ritual. The divine demand is not for ritual but for civic righteousness. (3) We are living in a world of cause and effect, where every sin, personal and national, has to be paid for, and often with a terrible price. God and His laws are never, in the long run, mocked. (4) The true patriot is the man who is



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“ sick ” (6<sup>6</sup>) when he sees his country ruined by frivolity or vice ; who, whether on the platform, through the press, or in the pulpit, tells his country the unvarnished truth about itself. (5) The true patriot is the man whose interest is not confined to the welfare of his country, but who longs for the material and moral advance of all the world (chaps. 1 and 2). He believes that God loves all nations and has His purposes for them all. Ethiopia is as dear and as necessary as Israel.

### BANDS OF LOVE

(Hosea 11<sup>1-11</sup>)

The long and brilliant reign of Uzziah in Judah (782-740 B.C.) had its counterpart in the equally long and brilliant reign of Jeroboam II over Israel (781-740). After the death of Jeroboam, however, the kingdom of Israel hastened rapidly to its fall, which came in 721. The melancholy story of the first seven years of the intervening period, which was filled with confusion, anarchy, assassinations, and frequent changes of dynasty, is told in 2 Kings 15<sup>8-38</sup>—a chapter which should be read before the study of Hosea is entered upon, as it forms the historical background of his prophecy. The political confusion seems to be reflected in the fragmentary and desperate condition of the text of his book, which is often so obscure as to be quite untranslatable. Much of this very chapter (11) is very difficult and

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uncertain, the latter half of verse 7, for example, is absolutely unintelligible as it stands ; but the broad outlines of the chapter can be made out ; the detail is often very striking, and contains some of the finest expressions of Hosea's message.

The most characteristic feature of this message is its tender and earnest insistence upon the love of God. To make this plain Hosea carried his hearers back to the early days when Israel was crushed beneath the heel of Egypt. But at length Jehovah in His mighty love brought His dear child (*i.e.* Israel) out of the horrors of that bondage into the goodly land of Canaan, in which his descendants were to work out their great national destiny. No sooner, however, were they settled in the land than they fell a prey to the foul Baal worship : " They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to graven images." Through His prophets Jehovah kept calling to them to abandon their folly and to walk in His better way, but " the more I called them, the further they went astray from Me." Very beautiful is the imagery in verse 3 used to symbolize the tender, patient love of God. He behaved to Israel as a father teaching his little child to walk. When the child grows tired and stumbles, the good father takes him in his arms and carries him. Such is the love with which Jehovah accompanied and sustained them, in His efforts to get them to walk in His own way. But it was all in vain ; they were stubborn, irresponsible, stupid : " they did not know." Often and often

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He sought to draw them with bands of love, "with cords of a man"—a striking phrase which suggests that love is the most distinctively human thing, as it is the most distinctively divine; but they refused to be drawn. At this point in verse 4 the text becomes very difficult, but the figure appears to be that of a kind and patient driver helping his tired beast up the hill. He lifts the yoke that it may not chafe or pain the beast, and, when the summit is reached, he gives him something to eat. In its simplicity and graphic power this image is perfect—the tired beast, the kind driver, the hill, steep but not too steep for the beast drawn by cords of human kindness.

Such, says Hosea, was the kindly love of God, and such as it was it is, for the divine love is everlasting. But it is sadly possible for foolish and obstinate men to resist it, and that is just what Israel did. They would turn anywhere but toward it—to the Baals, to Egypt, and Assyria, the two powers with which different parties in Israel were forever coquetting; but never to God and His love. The "hang" of their life was away from Him, and there could be but one end to such a fatuous policy; the sword would one day whirl and rage in their cities and consume them. How the poor prophet's heart was convulsed as he contemplated the doom on which his foolish people were rushing! From the quiet country road up which the driver was lovingly leading his exhausted beast, his words

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plunge us into cities where war was raging and swords were reeking with blood ; and all because the people “ refuse to turn ” to Him who could save them, all because they will not walk in His healthy, happy ways.

So careless and obstinate a people deserve to be destroyed like “ Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Jehovah overthrew in His anger and in His wrath ” (Deut. 29<sup>23</sup>). Yet Jehovah’s is a love which will not let His people go. The pity which lifted the yoke from the neck will not be baffled ; for Jehovah is God and not man, kinder than the kindest father who takes his tired child upon his arm, gentler than the gentlest driver who helps his weary horse uphill. The tumult of conflicting emotions which throb in Hosea’s soul is wonderfully reflected in the surging words of verses 8-9. Israel deserves nothing but destruction, absolute and irremediable, at the hands of Jehovah, but His heart kindles to pity for the son whom He had called out of Egypt and taught to walk in the olden times. How can He give up and cast off utterly one whom He loves so dearly ? A man might do that with his prodigal son, for there are limits to the patience of men. But He is God and not man, “ the Holy One,” lifted above the fluctuations of human passion, and constant to His purpose of everlasting love. Verses 10 and 11 are very difficult and obscure, but they appear broadly to suggest that at last, in response to the loud call of Jehovah, the people would sub-

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missively return, to be securely and permanently settled in their own land under the divine protection.

Through the all but desperate difficulties of this chapter two thoughts shine clearly out : 1. That national sin will be punished. If a nation persists in "backsliding" (verse 7), in turning away from the highest, in sacrificing its strength and mind and heart to gods of gold or to any other inferior and unworthy service (verse 2), and if it persistently "refuses to return" (verse 5), then it need not be surprised if some very stern discipline is in store which may even take the form of the sword in its cities (verse 6). This is precisely what happened to Israel within less than twenty years ; this is what has happened to Europe to-day. Whatever may have been the immediate causes of the war, there were many grievous blots on the national life of every land ; all had gone astray, some more, some less, from the ways of moral health and holiness—intemperance, impurity, slumdom, are proof enough of that, and the terrible scourge of war may help to lash the nations back to sobriety, purity, righteousness, and God. 2. God is love. That is our hope amid all national and international confusion, that the God who at least tolerates war, if He does not send it, has no wish to destroy, but only to save, men and nations. Through the great events of these latter years He has been "roaring like a lion" (verse 10) in the thoughtless ears of the world ; and those who tremblingly give heed to the call will find Him full of love and pity,

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caring for them infinitely more than the kindest driver for his beast, or even than the happiest father for the little child whom he is teaching to walk.

### THE CALL OF ISAIAH

(Isa. 6)

The sublime words in which Isaiah describes his vision and his call are fortunately so simple as to need little elucidation. Note the following points. (1) The vision and the call came to him "in the year that King Uzziah died," *i.e.* in 740 B.C. But this statement is far more than a mere note of time. Remember the long and brilliant reign of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26<sup>15</sup>), and think how the death of the man who had lifted Judah to such splendour would affect the people; it would seem as if the sun had fallen out of their sky. But though the king died, God did not die; even then Isaiah saw Him "upon His throne"—a thought well fitted to steady anyone who has to face domestic loss or national trouble. (2) The vision came to Isaiah in the temple of whose worship verses 2 and 3 are reminiscent. The song of the seraphim may have been suggested by responsive songs of the temple choir, and the seraphim themselves (the word is used in Num. 21<sup>6-9</sup> of the serpents which plagued the Israelites in the wilderness) by the brazen serpent which was at that very time to be seen in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Kings 18<sup>4</sup>). This helps us to see that the vision was coloured

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by Isaiah's experience, just as our own dreams, however grotesque, have always some point of contact with our waking life. (3) The sight of the holy God threw Isaiah into terror, as he reflected upon his own sinfulness. It is curious that he especially singled out the sin upon his lips: that must be burnt off. Is it possible, as one has suggested, that the prophet had accused God of harshness in smiting Uzziah with leprosy (2 Kings 15<sup>5</sup>)? At any rate, it is a subtle reminder that one who would serve God truly must have lips that are undefiled by evil of any kind—whether slander, or profanity, or unseemly stories. (4) The task upon which Isaiah was sent, after his sin was removed and forgiven, was a surprising and painful one—to deliver a message which was to be continually rejected. The more he would preach the more dull and callous his hearers would become, till healing would be no longer possible. The words, though put here in the imperative, are to be explained as the statement of a great law, that if men, under the influence of preaching, do not grow more responsive, they will grow more callous. The penalty of their indifference is simply that they will be confirmed in it till all spiritual receptivity is lost. Isaiah started his ministry under no illusions. (5) This irresponsiveness to his preaching, Isaiah was assured, would last till war should come and the land be made a desolation and the people be swept into exile. Then perhaps God and His kingdom and the preacher

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and his message would get a chance. Alas! we have learned that even a war which has emptied innumerable homes, crippled every nation, and laid waste the world, has not been able to shake some people out of their incurable obtuseness and frivolity (*cf.* 22<sup>12-14</sup>).

The points to single out for application would be these : (1) The preparation for the vision. Such a vision comes to those, like Isaiah, who love the temple or the church and its worship. It was in the temple that it came to him, and he describes it in terms of the familiar temple worship. (2) The vision was a vision of the Lord upon His throne. Earthly kings may die, and earthly empires totter, but the Lord God omnipotent reigns and carries out His purpose, through and despite all human confusion. This is a vision that comforts and steadies in time of distress. (3) The effect of the vision. (*a*) The first effect of the vision of so holy a God was to prostrate him—so Peter, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man” : (*b*) the second was to equip him with the power he needed for his task ; and the first essential in his equipment was his forgiveness. (4) The call. After he was forgiven he heard the call ; the forgiven soul is sensitive to the needs of the world, and expresses its consecration in the resolve to serve. Emotion must not be allowed to evaporate, it must translate itself into eager and immediate service. (5) The need of the world constitutes the call. It is very instructive to note



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that Isaiah did not receive a special call ; it was a general call, thrown out, as it were, across the world—"Who will go?" Never was the need so great as to-day—in the city, in the nation, on the mission field—the need, amid our social, political, and international problems, of true, brave men. This call, constituted by the need of the world, is one which comes to us all, whether we are magnificently equipped, like Isaiah, or not. A student of mine, who has done effective mission work in Korea, told me that he had felt called to that country just by reading in a mission study circle of its sore need. Wherever you see a need, you should hear a call.

(6) The work to which we are called, however hard, must be done in a spirit of hope. Preaching was grim work to Isaiah, but the last clause of the chapter is radiant with the hope invincible, that out of the old will rise a new community and a better day.

### HOW TO SECURE INTERNATIONAL PEACE

(Isa. 2<sup>2-4</sup> ; 11<sup>1-9</sup>)

The great words of the prophets never grow old. These two passages, particularly the first, embody the visions and truths which would save the shattered nations of to-day—and we are all shattered, victors and vanquished alike—if we would only lay them upon our heart and translate them into action in the sphere of national and international politics.

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Both passages picture the world as it ought to be, and as the prophet believes it will be in the end. The world in which he lived was, like our own, full of national rivalries, jealousies, and animosities, with their inevitable accompaniment of armaments, "swords and spears" (2<sup>4</sup>). Now that is a world which no decent man wants to perpetuate; and the prophet's problem, like our own, was how to transform it into a place worthy of sane and friendly men. He longed for peace and he saw that peace meant disarmament. The nations prepared for war, and they had it; if they prepared for peace, they might have it too. But peace could not exist with the multiplication of murderous weapons. How, then, were these to be got rid of?

The prophet says, "By arbitration"—by submitting international disputes to an impartial judicial body whom the nations can whole-heartedly trust; that is the essential meaning of the passage 2<sup>2-4</sup>. Nations are seen flocking to Jerusalem: why? First, because there is some international dispute; they are conscious that they need teaching, guidance, "law" (2<sup>3</sup>), *i.e.* a decision; and secondly, because they are sure they will find it in Jerusalem. It is from that city that law goes forth, it is there that "He [that is, God] will teach us of His ways"—not in any miraculous way, but just through good and wise and friendly men who understand His will. The nations are very much in earnest, the quarrel is a serious one, they are armed to the teeth, their

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arsenals are crammed with bows and spears, and they might have drenched the world with blood, had the better way not occurred to them of going to Zion (that is, Jerusalem) to lay their case before an impartial tribunal. But why to Jerusalem? Because that is the home of the God of justice, the home of men like Isaiah, passionate champions of absolute fair-play, into whose hands the most contentious nations, if only they were honest, might confidently commit their case. The confidence of the nations has not been misplaced; for when the decision has been pronounced, they immediately beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; because the tribunal is impartial, they trust its decisions, the dispute is settled, and they have now no more use for their munitions of war.

Incidentally there are two striking and suggestive points here. (1) The world of the prophet's dream is a smiling countryside, where ploughshares and pruning-hooks will do their beneficent work. (2) He does not propose to destroy the deadly weapons of war but to transform them. There are times in which we could wish that every gun were shivered to atoms and that every warship in the world were at the bottom of the sea. This is the mood of Isa. 9<sup>5</sup>, where the prophet longs to see every instrument of war consigned to the devouring flames. But the idea in the present passage is nobler still. A peaceful use is possible for those terrible instru-

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ments. Nothing needs to be destroyed ; nothing but the spirit of hate ; transform the men, and they will soon transform their deadliest weapons into things of beneficent power.

The passage in **II**<sup>1-9</sup> has a national rather than an international outlook. It describes the ideal king and the ideal kingdom ; and here again it is significant that justice is singled out as the quality of pre-eminent importance in the ruler, and perhaps, too, if **II**<sup>6-9</sup> is to be intimately connected with **II**<sup>1-5</sup>, as the most sure guarantee of peace. Even the animal world is beautifully portrayed as sharing in this peace—wild and tame being found grazing peacefully together—and the presence of a little child among the wild animals prettily suggests how tame they have become.

No truths are more needed in the present day than those emphasized in **2**<sup>2-4</sup>. To secure international peace and universal disarmament there must be (1) a hatred and horror of war. The nations in this passage might have settled their quarrel by an appeal to the sword, but they chose the more excellent way of arbitration. Fortunately now there are millions of young men in every land who are under no illusion as to the glories of war, who know from stern experience that war is hell. Everything that tends to cast a glamour over war or to perpetuate antagonisms between nations, as much history teaching has done in the past, must be ruthlessly eliminated from the education of children.

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School and church must combine to diffuse the sentiment of goodwill to the men and children of other lands, and to create a public mind which will demand a peaceful and not a military solution of international problems. (2) There must be a tribunal which the nations can trust. It matters not where that tribunal may be: the prophet believed that its site would be Jerusalem. There has already been such a tribunal at The Hague; and we cannot be too grateful that there is now a "Permanent Court of International Justice, with its own bench of salaried judges, its fixed seat, its regular sittings, its jurisdiction over any question disputant States voluntarily submit and over many which recent treaties bind their signatories to refer. This is one of the barriers the League is erecting against war," and it is an essential fulfilment of the prophet's dream. (3) There must be a readiness to abide by the decision of such a court when it has been pronounced. The best of tribunals will be impotent if nations ignore or repudiate its decision. Machinery can be devised which would make it a perilous matter to defy the findings of an impartial court, duly appointed to safeguard the interests of international welfare; but the best safeguard will be a love of justice, and a clear recognition of the fact that, after all, the best things in the world are not the things about which men quarrel, but the things of the spirit, like music, literature, religion, which do not diminish by being shared. In point of

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fact, too, nations have sometimes gracefully accepted decisions which went against them. In connection with the decision on the fisheries question of the century old dispute between the United States and Great Britain, the President of the Hague Tribunal twelve years ago used very striking words to characterize its importance. "And now," said he, "these two nations to which the world is indebted for so much of its progress in every sphere of human thought and action have agreed to submit their long-standing conflict to the arbitration of this tribunal. In so doing, these Governments have set an example to the whole community of nations, and have acquired a new merit in the sublime cause of international justice and peace." (4) There is the duty of hope. The prophecy asserts that the settlement by arbitration of international disputes "shall come to pass in the latter days." It takes high courage to believe this in the face of the militarism which has so successfully contrived to survive the war which was to end war. It was said by a British publicist that some of the victorious Allied powers were then spending "four times more in war preparations than they were before the war broke out. And they are all members of the League! The only international step taken since the Great War closed to minimize the chance of another homicidal outburst is the step taken by the American Government, which is not a member of the League, in inviting a conference to consider a reduction in

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armaments.” This maintenance of a discredited militarism is nothing less than disgraceful. But, as we believe in God, we dare not lose heart or hope. There are facts to set on the other side, such as the conference last year on the reduction of armaments, to which we have just alluded, called by the President of the United States. Again, among most civilized nations duelling is a thing of the past. Men do not settle their quarrels now by pistols, but by an appeal to reason as embodied in the courts. And shall we not dare to believe that the reason which now prevails in the settlement of disputes between individuals shall eventually prevail in disputes between nations ? But again, the world has never been more weary of war or understood more clearly its appalling consequences. The peace which has followed the Great War leaves us hardly less wretched than the war itself. And it will be strange indeed if, in view of the devastation of homes and hearts and life-work which has touched us all, the united wisdom of all the good men of every land will be unable to devise a means of escape for which they so passionately long. No man who believes in God can believe that the progress of humanity is to be from chaos to chaos. Rather shall we believe with the prophet that a time is coming when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war any more.”

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## THE PROPHET AS WATCHMAN

(Ezek. 2<sup>1</sup>-3<sup>27</sup>)

There were two sieges of Jerusalem by the Babylonians ; the one which ended in 586 with the destruction of the city and the deportation of its people was preceded by another, in 597, which also involved the deportation of King Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24<sup>15</sup>) and many of the leading men. With this group "Ezekiel the priest" was carried into exile, and the vision which opens his book came to him, he tells us, "in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity," *i.e.* in 592. Ezekiel differs from the earlier prophets, such as Amos or Isaiah, in this, that while they addressed themselves to the nation, he, as chap. 3 admirably illustrates, is supremely concerned with the moral welfare of the individuals whom he addresses, and he is the first example of what we should to-day call a pastor.

Chapter 2 shows how hard his task was. He was very conscious of addressing a "rebellious house," impudent and stiff-hearted, who were vastly more likely to reject than to accept his message. But he was not asked to face them until he had had the glorious vision of the power, omnipresence, and omniscience of God which occupies chap. 1. Ezekiel, prostrated by the vision, was then addressed as "son of man" (a phrase designed to express his frailty in contrast with the majesty of God), and bidden to rise and accept his commission for service.



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That service was to declare the message of God, which, though in the last half of his book (chaps. 25-48) it becomes a message of hope and promise, is in the first half (1-24) and expressly here (2<sup>10</sup>) a message of doom—he is thinking of the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent exile—a doom justified by the past and present infidelity and idolatry of the people (*cf.* chap. 8). There was every temptation on his part to refuse to embark upon so perilous a course, to “rebel” in one way as the people had rebelled in another; nevertheless he must speak his message without flinching or fear.

His inspiration is suggestively described by the symbolical swallowing of a bookroll; the discovery of the book of the Law (*i.e.* the Book of Deuteronomy) thirty years before had doubtless suggested the idea of a book as a source of divine revelation. Ezekiel was to swallow the roll—that is, to digest the book and make its ideas his very own. When he ate the roll, bitter as were its contents, it was as sweet as honey in his mouth; for it is sweet to do the will of God and to be trusted with tasks for Him. The task, he was again reminded, would be unspeakably hard, for his stubborn hearers would be less responsive to the divine message than even heathen foreigners would have been; but he was to go resolutely forward, trusting in the God who had called and could equip and sustain him. He then found his way to Tel-abib, a colony of his fellow-exiles, where

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he remained for a week in a state of utter stupefaction, dumb and motionless.

Then he received another message. His task was then defined as that of a watchman. As it is the watchman's business to detect and give warning of danger, so it was the prophet's business to warn individual men of the coming catastrophe which he himself so clearly saw. And it was not enough to warn the crowd; he had to deal personally with individuals, good and bad, and warn them solemnly, each and all, the good no less than the bad—the bad to turn from his evil way, and the good to persist to the end without swerving from the good way; for the destiny of men will be determined by the character and conduct they exhibit when the hour of judgment strikes.

The passage suggests that it is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the teacher, and, in general, of education, in the process of reconstructing a world shattered, as Ezekiel's world was and as ours is, by war and its tragic consequences; and, in connection with it, it would be well to read H. G. Wells's fierce insistence on the inconceivable importance of education in his recent book on *The Salvaging of Civilization*. We learn (1) that the teacher must have a vision of what he would be at. In our time he must clearly understand that the ultimate aim of education is to create an intelligent world-citizenship. If the nations cannot all learn that they are members one of another and that each

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needs every other, then civilization as we know it is doomed to perish. How a clear conception of this would put purpose and fire into the detail of history and geography, much of which now seems so dreary ! To speak powerfully and truly we must first see clearly. (2) The teacher must make the message his own. This is what is meant by the strong language of 3<sup>3</sup>. He must not repeat it in parrot-like fashion, he must work it into the very fibre of his being until it is his very self that he is uttering ; and he must speak it out with courage, whether people like to hear it or not. Small-hearted patriots may resent the invitation to think internationally ; but it is either that or chaos. The teacher should teach himself and his pupil to remember that God “loved *the world*” (John 3<sup>16</sup>). (3) The teacher must give time and thought, like Jesus, to the individual as well as to the class or crowd. His business is not only to give information, but to create an outlook and to mould character. If he does not do that, what is he there for ? He is there, in Ezekiel’s words, to “warn” of the doom which will overtake us all if we do not think large and generous thoughts. He is responsible for the individual souls of his class, and the prophet sternly maintains that, if one of them dies unwarned, the teacher is his murderer. Good and bad alike need warning, for the individual life and the world of to-day are alive with dangers.

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## THE NEED OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

(Ezek. 34)

Ezekiel is addressing the Jewish exiles in Babylon, and in this section of his book (chaps. 33-39) he is showing them how to prepare for the blessed future, with the restoration and reorganization of the nation which he so confidently anticipates. The first and fundamental item on his programme is the need of a deepened sense of personal responsibility, and with that he deals in chap. 33. In chap. 34 he deals with the importance of good government; for besides moral excellence on the part of its citizens, every State that is to be happy and efficient needs good government. This chapter is a very severe indictment of the rulers or kings of Israel in the past, who are compared to shepherds—and the figure is maintained throughout the chapter—that have neglected or abused the flock. Governors should govern in the interests of the governed; but those “shepherds” had used their power to feed themselves and not the flock—they are even compared to ravenous beasts in verse 10. It was this misgovernment that in part accounted for the miseries, the defeats, the exile of Israel (verses 1-10).

Therefore these evil shepherds must be replaced by none other than Jehovah Himself, the great Shepherd of the sheep, who will lovingly tend them and seek them out on the dark and cloudy day, and bring them back from exile to their own true

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pasture-land (verses 11-16). But among the flock there were differences too, the strong (*i.e.* the rich) treating the weak with selfishness and brutality. This, too, must end (verses 17-22).

In the coming days, while Jehovah will indeed be the chief Shepherd, there will still be an earthly shepherd to correspond to the old order of evil shepherds; in plain words, the monarchy will continue, but the monarch will have a real shepherd heart. His title, "My servant David," by no means implies the resurrection of the dead king of the olden times, but only a succession (or the first of a succession) of rulers continuing the Davidic line, or possibly even only one who will rule in the spirit and power of David. Instead of the divided kingdom, whose component parts (Israel and Judah) had run their parallel and sometimes hostile course for centuries, was to be the united kingdom, under one shepherd, *i.e.* one king. Then would come the glorious Messianic days, "the covenant of peace" or "welfare," whose leading features would be the fertility of the land, the extirpation of its wild beasts, and the security of its people from native and foreign oppressors (verses 23-31).

Though the thoughts of this passage are clothed in the language of the ancient world, the thoughts themselves are as important for the modern world as if they had been written yesterday. There is (1) the idea of the nation's (or the world's) need of a divine Shepherd. It is interesting and gratifying

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to find even a novelist like H. G. Wells reaching the conclusion that there can be no worthy future for the nations of the world without a recognition of God. It is under His shelter, supervision, and inspiration that men and nations must go forward to their tasks. (2) The need of human governors who will not exploit but who will care for the welfare of the peoples committed to their charge, as a good shepherd cares for his sheep. Whether the form of government be a republic (as Wells conceives it) or a monarchy (as Ezekiel conceives it) the governors must be men who are not out for their own hand, men who do not regard the people as mere means to the securing of their own power or profit or pleasure, but men who strain every nerve to advance the physical, intellectual, and moral welfare of the people over whom they are set. (3) There must be no exploitation within the nation of one class by another. All must recognize that, in the last analysis, the true interests of all classes are identical and that there can be no stability or security for a nation where some of its citizens are living in opulence and many in penury. (4) The union of Israel and Judah as an element in the happiness of the national future is an adumbration of a similar union of all the nations in the happiness of the world's future. On a small scale such a union has been consummated many a time already. Scotland and England, which fought each other for centuries, have long been united; the States of America are

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known to all the world as the United States. It is not beyond the range of possibility—though it will tax to the uttermost the resources of statesmanship, mutual confidence, and goodwill—that there may one day be the United States of Europe, and then we should not be far from the United States of the World. This sort of federation must at least be the goal on which will be fixed the eyes of all who refuse to despair of the world's future. Then with a world so sensible, harmonious, and reconcilable, no nation, small or great, would fear attack from without or from within. There would be many folds, but there would be but one flock and one Shepherd.

### RECONSTRUCTION

(Malachi 3<sup>1-12</sup>)

Malachi falls within the period of Nehemiah and Ezra ; he appears to have been one of those who by his preaching prepared the way for the reformation which they succeeded in establishing, and his date is somewhere about 460-450 B.C. Society was in those days rather chaotic: good people were asking, "Where is the God of justice?" (2<sup>17</sup>), and the opening verses of chap. 3 constitute Malachi's answer to this question, "Behold, I send My messenger." It is not certain whom Malachi conceives this messenger to be ; but he is probably Elijah (*cf.* 4<sup>5</sup>), whether by this we are to understand

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the famous ancient prophet come back from heaven (2 Kings 2<sup>11</sup>) or some prophet with the spirit and power of Elijah (*cf.* Matt. 11<sup>14</sup>). In any case, the function of this messenger is simply to clear the obstacles out of the way of the Lord, who is coming suddenly and soon. He is coming indeed, but first of all in judgment: the day of His appearing will be a terrible day of fiery purging for the sinners that had disgraced their country—alike the clergy and the people, the clergy who had been listless and apathetic in their sacred office (1<sup>13</sup>), and the people who had sinned in the manifold ways described in verse 5. The whole of their national history, Malachi urges, has been one long record of disobedience, and nothing can lift the curse which rests upon the land but penitence, a genuine return to the God whom they have been provoking by their shallow and immoral life, and defrauding by withholding the sanctuary dues. The divine curse was only too plain, Malachi believed, in the drought from which the land was suffering and in the havoc wrought by locusts; but Jehovah, the prophet assures them, would respond to the sincere and honest efforts of His people by opening the windows of heaven and sending down a blessing in the form of abundance of rain which would revive the parched fields. Judah would smile again, she would be a delightful land; her prosperity would be so wonderful as to attract the envious attention of the whole world. Upon their sad and darkened country the sun would arise from



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whose beams would stream healing upon their wounded hearts (4<sup>2</sup>).

The passage, though so far away, is full of meaning for the world to-day. It suggests (1) the nature of national sin. Malachi has very severe things to say about the neglect of the Church both by clergy and people : the apathetic clergy and the stingy people both fall under his lash. A really worthy Church represents the highest interests of the nation, and, as such, deserves the hearty support, financial and other, of every citizen who has his country's spiritual welfare at heart. But when we come to the social aspect of sin we see that Malachi could be as practical as Nehemiah. The sins enumerated in verse 5 are just the sins which still curse nations to-day — superstition, impurity, falsehood, disregard of the rights of the defenceless, such as widows and orphans, defrauding the workman of his fair wages. This is what the Old Testament means by sin ; and it is very significant that all these things are here traced to disregard of God — “they fear not Me, saith Jehovah.” (2) The penalty of national sin. For all these things “I will come near to you in judgment.” Nothing can retard the judgment upon sin ; Carlyle has been the most eloquent modern exponent of this faith. In certain great historical crises, and assuredly in that through which to-day the nations are passing, God has almost visibly appeared and exacted a terrible penalty for the accumulated wrongs, blunders, suspicions, ambitions, intrigues, sins of the past.

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(3) But if the world's bruised and broken nations resolve upon a saner and more Christian social and international policy, if they strive as earnestly to have their ambitions inspired and their policies shaped by the mind of Jesus as they have sought for power and national aggrandizement, then the sun of righteousness will at last arise upon our poor, worn, and distracted world, and we shall be warmed and healed and glad again.

### THE ALL-EMBRACING LOVE OF GOD

(Jonah 3<sup>1</sup>-4<sup>11</sup>)

It is little less than a tragedy that to most people the book of Jonah is chiefly known for its connection with a great fish. Anyone who takes the trouble to read it—and it is one of the shortest of books—will see what an insignificant part the fish plays in the story ; and if the two verses which contain references to it were cut out (1<sup>17</sup> and 2<sup>10</sup>), the great lesson of the book would be affected in no way whatever ; for its lesson is that the love of God is not confined to any one nation, but stretches over all the world, embracing nations which, it may even be, our own nation hates. The book is the everlasting rebuke of all small patriotisms, a touching appeal for a world-wide citizenship, and a clarion call to the extension of the foreign missionary enterprise and to the fervent proclamation of the immeasurable love of God for all men.

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Jonah, who represents Israel, was called to be a foreign missionary, and the wonderful thing is that he was commissioned to carry the message of God not merely to a foreign and distant people, but to an enemy people. The point is missed unless we remember that the Assyrian empire, to whose chief city, Nineveh, Jonah is represented as being sent (1<sup>2</sup>), was the empire which for the better part of two centuries (the eighth and seventh B.C.) had ground Israel under its iron heel. Jonah, who was a "little Israelite," refused to go, he endeavoured to put the length of the world between himself and his call: he was called to Assyria in the far East, and he sought to fly to Tarshish in Spain in the far West. No good ever comes of disobeying the reasonable and generous voice of God. The first chapter tells in its inimitable way how, almost before he was out of sight of land, Jonah was involved in a storm raised by the very God from whom he was endeavouring to escape, whom he thought he could evade, and, further, how his single disobedience nearly involved the lives of a boatful of innocent men: suggesting that "we are all in the same boat" and one man's folly may bring disaster upon many.

But after Jonah had confessed and been punished and restored to the dry land the call came to him again; and this time he, probably sulkily (*cf.* 4<sup>1\*</sup>), obeyed. There was no love in his message to the people of the great city whom in his heart he detested; he just grimly announced its impending

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destruction, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." When we think of the beautiful words ascribed to God in the two closing verses of the book, and of the infinite love that shines through them, we may be pretty sure that the message the small-hearted Jonah chose to deliver did not represent all the truth with which he had been entrusted. A man's own mind inevitably colours his message: loveless man, loveless message. But those heathen hearts in Nineveh are represented as responding immediately, every one of them, from the king on his throne to his humblest subject. There was a great act of public humiliation and repentance, and God relented when He saw them abandon their wicked ways.

This, however, was too much for Jonah. He did not wish to see them converted but destroyed, hated foreigners as they were; so he was angry, and he prayed a silly, shocking prayer. He knew how absurdly patient and kind God is—that is His nature; and what was to become of his own reputation as a prophet? Had he not foretold their destruction? and lo! to his disgust, they were to be saved after all. So he asked God to be good enough to kill him. He would be happier dead than alive in a world like that, where detestable foreigners were permitted to share in the love of God. Do you not see how the writer, with his inimitably delicate satire, is holding up to scorn and contempt this narrow-minded patriotism which longs for

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nothing so much as the annihilation of the enemy ? He is forcing you to feel how ridiculous, how shocking, how cruel, a patriotism can be which has no interest in, and no mercy for, the men of another nation. So God, who loved this hard-hearted man just as He loved the Ninevites, and was as eager to redeem him as them, sought by a series of experiences to deliver him from his wicked folly. Note how three times over in 4<sup>6-8</sup> (and once in 1<sup>17</sup>) it is said that God “prepared” certain experiences for Jonah. He wished to make them all, scorching as some of them were, work together for his ultimate good. One of the most awful pictures in the Bible is that of Jonah in 4<sup>5</sup> sitting on a hill outside the city, watching and hoping in his vindictive heart that God would after all destroy it. Something did happen—not, however, to the city, but to Jonah himself. He could contemplate with equanimity the destruction of a great city, but when his own comfort was rudely shattered, he was cut to the heart. And then come the glorious words (4<sup>10<sup>et</sup></sup>) in which the patient, gentle, loving God condescends to argue with the sulky Jonah—“You and I”—and to speak to him as a man to his friend. Shall God not have pity upon the great city in which are more than 120,000 innocent children, and much cattle ? If Assyrian policy had been cruel, surely at any rate the children had had nothing to do with it, and are they then to be punished ? and the exquisitely tender interest in the cattle is character-

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istic of the humane spirit of the Old Testament (*cf.* Deut. 25<sup>4</sup>; Prov. 12<sup>10</sup>). Could anything be nobler than this vision of a love which stretches across the world to distant cruel Nineveh and down even to the brute beasts ?

Suggestions : (1) The duty of those who know the gospel to carry it to those who do not. In one aspect the book is a foreign mission appeal. Israel had a truer and nobler message from God than other peoples, and it was her bounden duty to proclaim it. Many Israelites, like Jonah, resented this call, just as many Christians to-day ignore it. But the gospel is not for us only, but for "all the world," and the Church which is not a missionary Church is hardly worthy of the name. (2) The true missionary goes forth in faith and hope. The writer believes in the heathen, he believes that they can turn from their evil ways and repent (3<sup>10</sup>). At the bottom of the heathen heart there is something to which an appeal can be made ; how else could the missionary go forth at all ? Indeed the large-hearted writer of this book represents the so-called "heathen" as infinitely more susceptible to the call of God than Jonah, the representative of the chosen people. As Sir George Adam Smith has finely said, "Out there, beyond the covenant, in the great world lying in darkness, there live men with consciences and hearts, able to turn at His word and to hope in His mercy." (3) The all-embracing love of God. This is at once the motive which takes the missionary

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to the heathen and the gospel he preaches to them. Our small patriotism often finds it hard to transcend national boundaries ; there is often little generosity, even little mercy, in our thought of other nations, especially of those who have been our enemies. This incomparably gracious and beautiful book is meant to shame us out of all this meanness and vindictiveness of outlook by showing us, in the person of the unlovely Jonah, how small, how shabby, how wicked it is, and by confronting us with the inimitable love of God which encompasses Assyrians as well as Jews, our enemies as well as ourselves. God's love, like the sky, is over us all ; and the supreme lesson of the book, never more needed than to-day when the wounds of war are beginning to heal, is summed up in the fine words of Faber :

The love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

### THE BRUTE KINGDOMS AND THE HUMAN KINGDOM

(Dan. 2)

The world-outlook for which we pled in the last section is brilliantly set forth in this long and fascinating chapter. Very briefly the story is this : In chap. 1, Daniel and his three friends, Jewish captives

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at the court of Babylon, proved their fidelity to their religion by refusing to defile themselves with the king's food. At the end of the three years they showed themselves superior to the "wise" men of the empire. Then follows in chap. 2 a dream of Nebuchadrezzar in which a great image was shivered to pieces by a little stone, which grew till it filled the whole world. Daniel alone could retell and interpret the dream: it denoted a succession of kingdoms, which would all be ultimately overthrown and succeeded by the kingdom of God.

To the view of history underlying this dream there is a parallel in the vision of Daniel in chap. 7, which should be read alongside of chap. 2. In chap. 7, four great beasts are seen coming up out of the sea—the last of them especially cruel and terrible. Before the Judge who is seated upon His throne is brought one like a son of man (*i.e.* a man), who comes with the clouds of heaven—this human and heavenly figure being in striking contrast to the beasts that rise out of the sea. Daniel is informed that the beasts represent four kingdoms, whose dominion is to be superseded by the dominion of the saints of the Most High, *i.e.* by the kingdom of God, which will be everlasting. Evidently the vision and the dream are parallel.

What were those kingdoms or empires? With 11<sup>1,2</sup> in view, the answer is very simple. Without enigma or symbolism of any kind, the Persian empire is mentioned in 11<sup>2</sup>, as preceding the Greek, and in



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II<sup>1</sup> as being preceded by the Median, which in its turn had been preceded by the Babylonian. Here, then, in the plainest terms, is a succession of four empires — Babylonian, Median, Persian, Greek — the last to be succeeded by the kingdom of God; and the book was written in the second century B.C., in a time of fierce persecution, to console and strengthen the faithful and to confirm their hope in the coming kingdom of God, when the empire of brute force would once and for all be over.

The aim of chap. 2 has been well described by Professor Driver. It is

“to show (1) how the heathen king is brought (verse 47) to acknowledge the supremacy of Daniel’s God; (2) how the sequence of empires is in the hands of God (verse 21); and (3) how a divine kingdom is destined ultimately to be established upon earth. The representation of the magnificent but hollow splendour of earthly empire in the form of a ‘huge, gleaming, terrible colossus, of many colours and different metals,’ brilliant at its summit, but gradually deteriorating, both in material and appearance, toward its base, and, when struck by the falling rock, instantly collapsing into fragments, is fine and striking.”

In reading these words we are irresistibly reminded of the career and fate of the German empire, but we dare not forget that all the nations of the world have been involved in a common ruin, and that not one of them is a worthy representative of the kingdom of God. That is yet to come.

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These chaps. (2 and 7) embody a fine vision of history as not a mere tangle of events but the march of a purpose. In particular they teach us (1) that there can be no permanence for nations that worship and build on force. In time the brass and the iron shall be shattered no less surely than the clay. The ferocious nature of the policies of earthly empires is even more graphically portrayed in chap. 7, where they are compared to four wild beasts. It is the author's way of suggesting that those policies are brutal, the sort of thing you might expect from wild beasts rather than from sane men. How truly the writer has anticipated the modern world, with its nations which draw their symbols from fierce, cruel animals—the Russian bear, the British lion, the American eagle. Now you cannot build a world on mere force; a world poised on bayonets is very insecurely poised indeed. The spirit of militarism must die out or be destroyed in every nation, before the kingdom of God can come. As Havelock Ellis has recently said :

“Surely at no period of the world's history has it been so necessary as it is to-day to strike hard at militarism. Never before has it been so clearly visible that all civilization, even all the most elementary traditions of humanity and brotherhood, depend on the absolute destruction of militarism.”

(2) But we must cherish the faith that the era of force will pass and that the kingdom of God and the era of peace will surely come. The mighty image

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will be shattered by the little stone : or more plainly in chap. 7, the brute beasts will be followed by *the man*, *i.e.* the rule of force will one day give place to the rule of humanity. It is in this faith that, amid the disillusionings of our world-peace, men must continue to work and pray.

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